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Extradition proceedings initiated against alleged Luxor suspect

MONTEVIDEO (AP) — A Uruguayan judge has initiated extradition proceedings against an Egyptian accused of participating in a 1997 attack at Luxor, Egypt, that killed 62 people, mostly foreign tourists, authorities said Saturday. Al Said Hassan Al Mokhis was led to Judge Luis Charles' chambers on Friday to initiate the proceedings. Hassan Al Mokhis was arrested late last week when he tried to enter Uruguay from neighbouring Brazil using a false Malaysian passport. He was being held at police headquarters in downtown Montevideo, authorities said.

Serbia seizes U.S. drugs firm's Belgrade unit

VIENNA (R) — Armed Serbian police and officials seized the Belgrade unit of U.S. drugs firm ICN Pharmaceuticals on Saturday in a move company officials described as an attempt to disrupt peace talks on Kosovo. ICN Chairman and Chief Executive Milan Panic said the action was the latest in a series of measures by the Yugoslav authorities to stir up anti-Western sentiment as the big power-sponsored talks got underway near Paris. "The latest act... was the attempt to steal American property and confiscate ICN Pharmaceuticals," Panic told a group of journalists in Vienna after meeting Austrian political and business leaders. Serb authorities acted a day after the Serbian government announced it had re-evaluated the joint public and private ownership of the ICN's Yugoslav operation and was making Serbia's Health Fund the majority owner.

Crown Prince Abdullah sworn in as Regent

By Francesca Ciriaci

AMMAN — HRH Crown Prince Abdullah took the oath as Regent before the government on Saturday as His Majesty King Hussein was declared unable to exercise his constitutional duties.

The decision to transfer King Hussein's powers to a Regent was taken by the Cabinet in line with Article 28 of the Constitution, and it entails that Prince Abdullah is now invested with all authorities of head of state.

A statement by King Hussein's private physician, Lieutenant General Samir Farraj, said that the King was in stable condition despite the failure of his only kidney and liver but that "the heart and brain remain intact."

King Hussein underwent surgery to remove his left kidney in 1992.

"Due to the accelerated relapse of lymphoma, His Majesty had difficulty in breathing, which required putting him on a ventilator and under sedation," the statement said.

Prince Abdullah was sworn in as Regent after the Cabinet convened at the prime minister's office and deliberated that "in his current medical condition King Hussein is unable to carry out his normal duties," Information Minister Nasser Judeh said.

Earlier, one source said, plans to move the King from Al Hussein Medical Centre to his residence, Bab Al Salam, were halted "due to the gravity of the situation."

"The Constitution stipulates that when the King is in the country and unable to carry out his constitutional duties and responsibilities, then there are constitutional requirements and stipulations that empower the Cabinet to appoint a Regent," Judeh told hundreds of reporters from all over the world at a press conference.

The King returned home on Friday from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, where he had been rushed on Jan. 26 suffering a relapse of cancer. Officials said a second bone marrow transplant performed last week had failed, and the King insisted on returning home.

Prince Abdullah, named Crown Prince on Jan. 25, had been Regent for 10 days after the King returned to the U.S.

Lower House Deputy Speaker Bassam Haddadin said parliamentarians met on Friday to informally discuss transferring powers to Prince Abdullah, but the Cabinet session on Saturday was convened to act officially.

In an interview published on Saturday, the Regent pledged to implement all the directives of his father. "I have instructions from His Majesty the King to execute his advice to achieve what is best," Prince Abdullah was quoted as saying in the London-based Al Hayat newspaper.

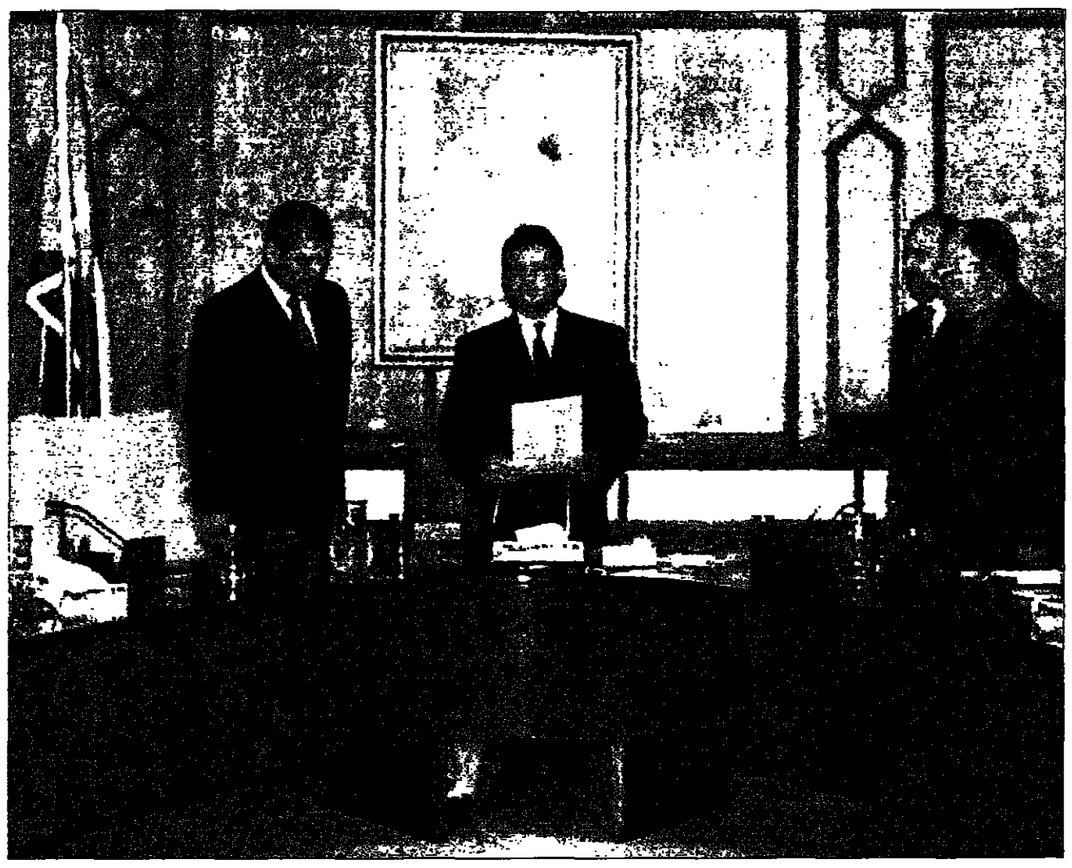
He pledged to continue Jordan's "traditional policy" on the Middle East peace process and on Iraq and to push ahead with democratic reforms.

Prince Abdullah said he had been "a little surprised" at his appointment as Crown Prince, but added that he had "always been ready to serve King and country."

He paid tribute to HRH Prince Hassan, who served as Crown Prince for 34 years before him, saying that Prince Hassan "can make a major contribution to the future of Jordan through national institutions and internationally as well."

Prince Abdullah promised "more support to the democratisation process, political pluralism and freedom of expression, and more support for civil society institutions"

(See separate story).



HRH Crown Prince Abdullah is sworn in as Regent before the Cabinet on Saturday (Petra photo)

King receives messages from Arab, foreign leaders

Agencies

HRH CROWN Prince Abdullah, the Regent, Saturday received a phone call from Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who expressed concern over His Majesty King Hussein's health.

"I'm very sad about the developments affecting King Hussein's health. He is a friend, brother and partner. I pray to God for His Majesty's health with all my heart. The nation needs his wise leadership," Mubarak told Jordan Television by telephone.

The president added that Egypt will always stand by Jordan.

"We will support Prince Abdullah all the way," he said.

Sudanese President Omar Hassan Bashir, in another phone call with JTV, expressed deep concern about the King's health condition and praised his historic stands and wise leadership.

"All the people in Sudan are worried and pray to God for the health of His Majesty, who always has been close to our country and its problems, even during his illness," Bashir said.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat prayed Saturday for King Hussein, saying the Arab and Muslim worlds still need his guidance.

"We call from the bottom of our hearts for God to save him," Arafat said of the King as he returned to his Gaza City headquarters from a trip abroad.

"He is an important figure, with a great role in the Arab and Islamic worlds and no doubt the Arab and Islamic nations still need him," he said.

U.S. President Bill Clinton said Saturday the United States would do "all that it can" to support Jordan.

"At this difficult time, my thoughts and prayers, as well as those of all Americans, are with His Majesty King Hussein, his family and the people of Jordan. The United States stands by Jordan and is determined to do all that it can to support and strengthen it.

"Next week, I will ask Congress promptly to provide the $300 million in supplemental bilateral assistance to Jordan that was promised as part of the Wye agreement," Clinton said.

Other Arab and foreign leaders also sent messages wishing the King well, including Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Shara'a, Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien.

Jordanians hold candles at a vigil for the King on Saturday (AP photo)

Stocks, exchange rate hold steady despite predictions

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — Stocks and the money market yesterday held relatively steady, defying predictions of heavy selling and a run on the U.S. dollar, stock brokers and bankers said yesterday.

"The Jordanian banks, as far as we can see, are calm and stable," said a source at the Housing Bank who requested anonymity. "They are able to support the monetary policy to maintain the dinar exchange rate. Whatever buying we see is a temporary spree that will come to an end soon."

The market closed with the Jordanian dinar standing at 714-717 fils against the U.S. dollar, while the price index at the Amman Financial Market dipped 1.63 per cent. Financial experts described both figures as "acceptable" in light of His Majesty King Hussein's deteriorating health.

"What is happening to Jordan at this moment is undeniably significant," said Mufleh Aqel, regional manager at the Arab Bank headquarters in Shmeisani. "We had a lot of worries before opening hours, but what we feared has not transpired. Transfers are so far insignificant. The buying that we see today cannot be felt as a trend or a scare."

The head of the Jordan Foreign Exchange Association, Mutia Kabariti, said that the local money market opened slightly higher than usual yesterday at 715-716 fils. He also described yesterday's buying as "a little higher than normal, but not high enough to be considered panic buying."

"We are seeing small purchases or transfers of $1,000-5,000 at a time here, but I think most of the worry is coming from the West Bank. I expect things there to stabilise quickly."

In the West Bank on Friday, the dinar lost to the dollar, and yesterday, bankers said the market closed yesterday at 715-720 fils to the greenback.

Bankers said the decline in the Palestinian areas was a "technical problem only," resulting from the fact that Jordanian banks in the Palestinian areas were closed on Friday for the Islamic holiday.

"This happens when demand comes when the market is closed," he said. "The Palestinians wanted to buy, but there was no supply from our banks."

Other bankers also said West Bank buying was "a spree" that they expected to stabilise by today.

Financial experts attributed the relative stability to several factors, particularly the fact that the Central Bank of Jordan has continued unrestricted selling of the dollar, which they say has helped boost confidence in the dinar. Also, many believe that the country saw the worst of "panic buying" last July, when King Hussein left abruptly to the United States for treatment of a non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. At that time, approximately $400 million fled the country in a two-week period in fear of political and monetary instability. More than $100 million has since returned and the CBJ has continued to supply dollars in any amount.

"Most of the 'panic' was over in July. After six months of the King's absence, the institutions continued to function as usual," said Aqel. "The issue [of succession] was settled once and for all, and making things clear alleviated a lot of tension."

Bankers also said confidence has been boosted by Arab and international attention showered on the Kingdom since King Hussein returned three days ago from the Mayo Clinic.

U.S. President Bill Clinton yesterday was reported as saying that he would offer a range of economic assistance to the Kingdom. In particular, he said, he would ask Congress next week to provide $300 million in supplemental assistance to Jordan promised under the Wye River Agreement signed between the Palestinians and Israel last October and brokered at the last minute by King Hussein.

(Continued on page 2)

Crown Prince to face similar national challenges as King, analysts say

By Rana Sabbagh

AMMAN — HRH Crown Prince Abdullah, a career army officer sworn in as Regent on Saturday after the Cabinet declared His Majesty King Hussein incapacitated, will face the same daunting political and economic risks that challenged his father during his 47-year reign.

The acting sovereign takes over a country grappling with growing economic difficulties, popular unease over its 1994 peace accord with Israel, repeated military showdowns between Iraq and the U.S. and difficult ties with many of its Arab neighbours, some of whom it accuses of trying to undermine its stability.

Tension sparked by an impasse in Palestinian-Israeli talks has also cast a shadow over Jordan, which has close historic, demographic and economic links with the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

"The same problems facing Jordan for years, namely the domestic economic concern and the regional issues, still persist and will not disappear overnight," says a government official. "But Prince Abdullah will have to rely on good advisers much more than on the moral authority and on political instincts which King Hussein so ably used for decades."

NEWS ANALYSIS

To maintain future stability, he will have to draw on strong state institutions, on more active Cabinet involvement in the daily affairs of the nation, on deepening a nascent democracy, liberalising the economy and routing corruption — themes Prince Abdullah has underscored in meetings with all foreign visitors since King Hussein designated him as Crown Prince on Jan. 25.

The 37-year-old Prince, who has spent most of his adult life in the military — and in the last five years as commander of the army's elite Special Forces — has been overwhelmed by worldwide and local messages of support since King Hussein appointed him in place of his uncle, HRH Prince Hassan, who was the designated heir for 34 years.

Foreign guests who streamed to the palace included U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright — who revised her Middle East trip itinerary last week to reaffirm U.S. support for key ally Jordan — Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan Abdul Aziz and Seif Al Islam Qadhafi, the son of Libya's leader.

Since his appointment as heir apparent, Prince Abdullah, a father of two, marched smartly into the affairs of state, presiding over a Cabinet session and meeting with scores of top government and military officials to discuss matters of concern and chart strategy.

"So far, all public manifestations have reflected a smooth succession change and will hopefully herald a smooth transition into the future," says one analyst.

But it remains to be seen whether the Prince proves to be as adroit as the King in navigating Jordan through the intricate Middle East politics and local economic problems, including corruption, poverty, estimated at over 30 per cent of the population, and unemployment, officially put at 16 per cent and unofficially at higher rates.

Despite his military career, relatives and associates say he has had the chance to learn much from King Hussein and has come to appreciate and understand much about the country's socio-economic problems through his close involvement in the Kingdom's intricate security portfolio.

"He has had plenty of opportunity to observe how the King deals with Jordan's difficult circumstances and how he has become so popular in Jordan," says a relative. "That experience will be useful as he assumes the role of his father."

A U.S. official who met Prince Abdullah with Albright said the Regent was a "known quantity" in Washington from his frequent trips to the United States with the King and his talks in the Pentagon.

"If you see Prince Abdullah, you will see a chip of the old block, you will see charm, politeness," he said.

In his first published interviews as designated successor, Prince Abdullah pledged to continue Jordan's "traditional policy" on the Middle East peace process and on Iraq and to push ahead with democratic reform.

"I am an extension of His Majesty's outlook and His Majesty's beliefs," the New York Times quoted him as saying.

However, Prince Abdullah ruled out an imminent "rehabilitation of the Iraqi regime" and hinted that Iran would continue to be perceived as a threat to the security of the Gulf unless the liberalising forces represented by President Mohammad Khatami won over radicals.

Jordanian-Iraqi ties have remained cool but cordial since the government began calling for change in Baghdad after top Iraqi defections to Jordan in August 1995.

Iraq has yet to comment on the succession change in Jordan, but Iraq's most influential newspaper welcomed the appointment of Prince Abdullah in place of Prince Hassan, who had irked Baghdad.

Amman relies on Iraq for its full oil supplies and Baghdad remains the Kingdom's main market.

Yesterday, regional powerhouse Syria broke its two-week silence on developments in the Kingdom, congratulating Jordanians on their new Regent.

Ties between the two countries cooled considerably after Jordan signed the peace treaty with Israel, though Syrian President Hafez Assad telephoned King Hussein at least once during his illness.

Turning to the domestic scene, Prince Abdullah said there would be "more support to the process of democratic transformation, political pluralism, freedom of expression and a boost to civil institutions."

"I have directives [along these lines] from His Majesty King Hussein and I will work to carry through his advice," the London-based Arabic newspaper Al Hayat quoted him as saying Saturday.

Though these promises injected some ease into strained ties between the government and the vocal Muslim-led opposition, many politicians believe it will take a while before Prince Abdullah turns to their demands for greater freedoms as he and the government will be pressed to deal with other urgent issues.

(Continued on page 2)

Plant owner moves to sue U.S. over Sudan cruise missile attack

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Saudi businessman who claims ownership of the pharmaceutical plant in Sudan destroyed in a cruise missile attack last August is preparing to sue the United States for damages, his American lawyer said Friday.

Saleh Idris, whose lawyers say he owned the Al Shifa factory near the Sudanese capital Khartoum, will bring charges in a U.S. court unless the Clinton administration agrees to compensate him and unfreeze his assets in American banks, said attorney John Scanlon.

The administration accuses Idris of having business ties with Osama Ben Laden, whom U.S. officials blame for terrorist bombings of U.S. embassies in Africa. Idris denies any connection with Ben Laden, also a Saudi.

After the bombing, a presidential order froze about $28 million Idris has in American banks overseas, Scanlon said.

"Legal action is under consideration, we are preparing a case if need be but we'd be delighted to settle this calmly and rationally without moving forward legally," he said. Idris' lawyers say he purchased the plant in March 1998.

President Bill Clinton ordered the attack in retaliation for the terrorist bombing earlier in August of the embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. A suspected stronghold in Afghanistan of Ben Laden also was struck at the same time.

CIA Director George Tenet declared in subsequent Senate testimony that soil samples collected at the site of the Al Shifa plant had been found to contain the chemical EMPTA, a substance used as a key ingredient in the deadly VX nerve gas.

Tenet's claim was ridiculed by Jordanian and British engineers who built and operated the plant. They said it lacked the sophisticated equipment needed to handle chemical warfare agents.

Diplomats and journalists who toured the factory after the missile strike also reported no apparent evidence of chemical weapons. The Sudanese government said the plant's products were antibiotics and drugs to treat malaria and tuberculosis.

But in Washington, National Security Council spokesman P.J. Crowley reiterated on Friday that the administration stood by the original CIA findings.

"We have not changed our view about the appropriateness of the strike in August," said P.J. Crowley.

Scanlon said Idris, who lives in Jeddah and London, was demanding $30 million in damages. Scanlon said Idris, 46, purchased Al Shifa in March 1998 for $12 million, assuming debts of $18 million, his attorney said.

Idris' representatives have had contacts with the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence about the matter, Scanlon said. A congressional source confirmed that there was a meeting. But administration officials have rebuffed requests to discuss the matter, he added.

"We have not received similar consideration from the executive branch," he said. "They don't seem interested in the evidence."

Jordanians carry a woman who collapsed as she heard the news about His Majesty King Hussein's health outside the King Hussein Medical Centre in Amman (AFP photo)

Turkish FM says federation 'only' solution to Cyprus division

NICOSIA (Agencies) — Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem reiterated Saturday that a bi-communal federation between the Greek and Turkish sectors of Cyprus was the only viable solution to the island's 25-year division.

"The proposal to create a confederation is still on the table. It is the only viable proposal for a solution to the Cyprus problem," said Cem, speaking on the Turkish side of the divided capital.

"I want to make it clear. Turkey and the TRNC are taking and will take all necessary measures to counter threats" from the Greek-controlled south, he said.

Cem's comments came as he arrived for a brief visit with Turkish-Cypriot officials in the new coalition government of Dervish Eroglu in the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) which is recognised only by Ankara.

He said the proposal for an island federation of two equal entities, repeatedly put forward by TRNC chief Rauf Denktash, represented a political "continuity" despite Eroglu's new government.

The idea has been rejected by both Greece and the internationally recognised Greek-Cypriot government of President Glafcos Clerides.

Also Saturday, Cem said Greek Cypriots were trying to deploy new weaponry on the divided island after scrapping plans to place Russian missiles there.

"They are trying to create a balance by seeking to place new weaponry on the island," Cem told a news conference after meeting Denktash and other officials during a one-day visit.

He did not give details on the new armaments that he said Greek Cypriots were seeking to install.

Cem said the security issue topped his discussions with officials from the TRNC because "it is a period where the Greek Cypriot side is developing new delusions."

"They are now chasing a new strategic agreement and as stated in the Greek [Cypriot] press they are seeking to create a new offensive initiative against Turkey and the TRNC." Cyprus, facing Turkish threats of force, decided in December to divert a planned deployment of Russian-made S-300 missiles to the Greek island of Crete.

Palestinian hunger strikers hospitalised

NABLUS (R) — Five Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike in a Palestinian National Authority (PNA) jail were taken to hospital on Saturday after their condition deteriorated, witnesses and human rights workers said.

Sixty-five prisoners affiliated with the Islamist Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups began a hunger strike two weeks ago in Jneid prison near self-ruled Nablus in the West Bank to protest against their detention without trial.

Palestinian security officials refused to let reporters visit the prisoners in Watani hospital in Nablus. Hospital spokesmen declined to comment on the prisoners' conditions.

But a leading Palestinian rights group, LAW, said its activists had managed to visit the prisoners.

"The five detainees are severely ill. The deputy director of Watani hospital said they are refusing to take medication or glucose," LAW said in a statement.

The wife of one prisoner, who declined to be identified, told Reuters at the hospital that the prisoners had stopped drinking water on Saturday.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, under pressure from Israel and the United States, has cracked down on Islamist opposition groups since he signed an interim land-for-security accord with Israel last October.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which oppose Arafat's peace deals with Israel, have killed scores of Israelis in suicide attacks.

The recent arrests have raised tensions between the PNA and opposition groups.

The Wye accord, now frozen by Israel because of alleged Palestinian violations, called for further Israeli troop withdrawals in the West Bank in return for tougher action by Arafat against anti-Israeli violence.

Crown Prince to face similar national challenges as King, analysts say

(Continued from page 1)

Some sociologists say the success of the young and enthusiastic Regent will depend largely on his ability to play his cards right and to keep the country's vast mosaic of people together.

Many Jordanians had hoped for a longer transition for Prince Abdullah, but analysts say the warm affection displayed to him after he became heir reflected popular confidence in the King's choice.

Others are fond of him because he appears to be a unifying factor for the Royal Hashemite family that founded Jordan in 1921 and because he continues to enjoy warm ties with Prince Hassan who many expect will lend support to the Prince.

Meanwhile, the eyes of the whole world, including Israel, remain focused on developments in Jordan, where diplomats, officials and politicians see minimal risk for destabilisation.

"King Hussein became King at the age of 17 when the country had no state institutions, no economic base, the British controlled the army, the region was passing through turbulence and coups and assassinations were the name of the game," says a senior government official.

"And there are no challenges regarding the country's geopolitical position," he claimed.

"The Regent will build on 47 years of work by King Hussein, which is an outstanding capital for him to use. He comes at much better times as Jordan has institutions, a professional army and a respected standing, both regionally and internationally," he adds.

"He will not work in a vacuum and he will not start from scratch... He will draw on the well-established organisations and will inject fresh blood into the system."

Other politicians said pledges by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to channel some investments into the Kingdom, hire more Jordanians and deposit undisclosed sums in the Central Bank were "gestures of political support" for Jordan.

Albright said last week that her country, which provides Jordan with $225 million a year in economic and military assistance, was also looking at further ways to support the economy. And some foreign countries are considering further debt restructuring or write-offs.

"Any amount of aid that could come will be a shot in the arm and will create a spin-off effect for the economy," says an economist.

"However, the country is focusing on self-sustaining economic growth and economic reform over the last few years as it has realised it cannot go on for ever depending on aid."

Still, officials say the challenges that lie ahead for Jordan may be as crucial as those King Hussein endured during his rule.

Stocks, exchange rate hold steady despite predictions

(Continued from page 1)

Additionally, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have both entered into discussions with Jordanian officials on depositing $200-300 million each into the Central Bank's reserves. Further details were not available yesterday.

Meanwhile, brokers at the Amman Financial Market said that trading was better than expected, even though the bourse closed with a negative change in the share price index.

"Compared to our situation in Jordan, trading was normal," said one broker, who cannot be named according to market regulations. "The market was expected to see a drastic drop in prices, but prices did in fact react moderately."

Yesterday, the index stood at 175.28; Wednesday, it closed at 178.2.

Another broker said, "No matter what happens, there are some who will panic unreasonably, but their numbers are small."

Brokers also attributed what they more or less defined as "stability" to similar factors. The King's ailing health was discounted long ago, they said, and global support has also bolstered confidence.

"Also, some prices in certain sectors didn't react at all because they are perceived to have good earnings in 1998 and are expected to return a competitive yield," said one trader.

No company registered a positive change in yesterday's trading, according the AFM's daily bulletin. The largest change was in Arab Bank shares, which dropped JD2 per share. Other substantial drops in share price were registered in the industrial sector, with the Arab Potash Company shedding JD0.17 per share, followed by the Arab Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Company (-JD0.15), Jordan Phosphate Mines Company (-JD0.11), and the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company (-JD0.10).

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

JORDAN TELEVISION
Tel. 4773111-19
PROGRAMME TWO

16:10 Cartoon – The Pink Panther
16:20 .....The Pumpkin Patch
16:30 ..... Lift Off
17:00 .....Doc. – Survival
17:30 .....Vid Kids
18:00 .....Le Grand Secret
19:00 .....Le Journal
19:15 .....French Programme
19:30 .....News Headlines
19:35 Comedy – If Not For You
20:00 .....French Programme
20:30 Drama — Walker, Texas Ranger
21:15 ..Doc. – Eating and Health
21:30 .....Behind the Scenes
22:00 .....News in English
22:30 .....The Politician's Wife
23:10 Drama — Doogie Howser
23:59 ..... End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

05:03 .....Fajr
06:22 .....(Sunrise) Duha
11:50 .....Dhuhr
14:51 .....'Asr
17:18 .....Maghreb
18:37 .....'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifieh. Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811.
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771751.
Amman International Church Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifieh Tel. 5920146
The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331
The American Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Cold and cloudy weather conditions will prevail with clouds appearing at different altitudes. Rainfall is expected in the afternoon in all parts of the Kingdom. Winds will be southwesterly to westerly active. In Aqaba, skies will be partly cloudy, rainy, winds northerly active and seas rough.

Amman 06/10
Aqaba 10/18
Deserts 04/13
Jordan Valley 11/21

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 11, Aqaba 18 Humidity readings: Amman 62 per cent, Aqaba 40 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun 02/07
Jerash 04/12
Um Qays 04/12
Madaba 03/10
Petra 05/12
Dead Sea 09/19

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Ramzi Mazzawi.....4894788
Dr. Khalid Masri 5661144
Dr. Bassam Karadsheh 4389200
Dr. Khalid Abdo.....4657129
AMMAN:
Firas Pharmacy 5661912
Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730
Mayadah Pharmacy 5537004
Rukn Al Dawa Pharmacy .5536169

IRBID:
Dr. Ghazi Ta'ameh..... (02)250080
Fou'ad Pharmacy .(02)275360

ZARQA:
Dr. Samir Al Lawzi .....(09)989601
Palestine Pharmacy..(09)983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre.....4637111
Civil Defence Department .5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341
Civil Defence Emergency.....199
Rescue Police.. 192, 4621111, 4637777
Fire Brigade.....4617101
Blood Bank.....4775121
Highway Police.....5343402
Traffic Police.....4896390
Public Security Dept.....4630321
Hotel Complaints.....5605800
Price Complaints.....5661176
Water & Sewerage Complaints 4897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 4787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 0132
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs.....5661101
Jordan Television 4773111
Radio Jordan 4774111
Water Authority 5680100
J. Electricity Authority ...5815615
Electric Power Co.....4636381
RJ Flight Information....44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199
The Islamic, Abdli 5666131/7
Hussein Medical Centre....5856856
Luzmila 4630195
Khalidi Maternity.....4644281/6
Akileh Maternity.....4642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity....4642362
Malhas, J. Amman. 4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071
Shmeisani Hospital 5607431
Jordan Hospital 5607550
University Hospital 5353444
Al-Muasher Hospital .5667227/9
Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 4777101/3
Al-Bashir.....4775111/26
Army, Marka 4891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital.....5157100
Amal Hospital 5607155
Al Amal Cancer Centre ..5353000

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital .(09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital.. (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital .....(09)986731
Al Hikma Modern Hospital .....(09)990990

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital .(02)275555
Roman Catholic Hospital .....(02)272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital .....(02)7101372, (02)7103101
Rosary Sisters Hospital .....(02)7102831, (02)7102011
Speciality Hospital .....(02)7103100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)2040111

FOR THE TRAVELLER QUEEN ALIA AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone 44 (52700). Information on Royal Wings flights can be supplied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:35 .....Bangkok, Doha (RJ)
08:25 .....Bombay (RJ)
08:35 .....Jeddah (RJ)
08:50 .....Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
09:00 .....Beirut (RJ)
09:50 .Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
16:45 .....New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
18:05 .....Athens (RJ)
18:20 .....Madrid , Geneva (RJ)
19:40 ..... Rome (RJ)
20:30 .....London, Frankfurt (RJ)
21:00 .....Frankfurt, Brussels (RJ)
22:50 .....Vienna, Aqaba (RJ)
23:59 .....Cairo (RJ)

Other Flights
12:30 .....Aden (IY)
14:35 .....Istanbul (TK)
18:00 .....Dubai, Damascus (EK)
18:40 .....Beirut (ME)
18:45 .....Kiev (6U)
19:05 .....Paris (AF)
20:25 .....Tel Aviv (LY)
20:40 .....Cairo (MS)
22:25 ...London, Damascus (BA)
23:35 .....Amsterdam (KL)
23:55 .....Larnaca (CY)
00:55 .....Bucharest (RO)
02:00 .....Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
07:50 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
10:30 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
16:00..Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
17:45 Haifa (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
18:45 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
05:20 .....Beirut (RJ)
09:00 ..... Frankfurt (RJ)
10:00 .....Vienna, Rome (RJ)
10:50 .....Aqaba, Vienna (RJ)
11:25 ....Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
11:30 ..Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
12:15 ..... London (RJ)
12:15 .....Athens (RJ)
20:25 .....Cairo (RJ)
21:00 ....Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)
21:15 .....New Delhi (RJ)
21:30 .....Damascus (RJ)
22:30 ..... Bangkok (RJ)
22:45 .....Jeddah (RJ)
00:10 .....Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta (RJ)
00:30 .....Jeddah (RJ)

Other Flights
07:10 .....Frankfurt (LH)
13:30 .....Aden (IY)
15:35 .....Istanbul (TK)
19:00 .....Dubai (EK)
19:40 .....Kiev (6U)
20:00 .....Beirut (ME)
21:10 .....Tel Aviv (LY)
21:40 .....Cairo (MS)
00:35 .....Amsterdam (KL)
01:55 .....Bucharest (RO)
03:00 .....Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
08:15 Tel Aviv (arriving from QAIA) (RW)
08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
14:30..Haifa (from Marka Airport) (RW)
16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)
20:30 ...Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

Moments of sadness and dignity

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — His Majesty King Hussein's return flight home aboard the Royal plane was an emotionally-charged moment for his family, aides and crew members, a member of the Royal entourage said Saturday.

During the 12-hour flight, King Hussein was unconscious when he flew home after doctors at a U.S. clinic said they could no longer cure his cancer.

Marwan Muasher, Jordan's ambassador to Washington who accompanied the King on his way home, said the ailing Monarch fell unconscious at the hospital on Wednesday evening, a day after he completed his second bone marrow transplant, which failed.

"During the trip, the King was not in pain (as he was heavily sedated) and he slept comfortably," said Muasher, who spent most of the last seven months at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester Minnesota, where the King fought a six-month battle with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a type of cancer. "The whole entourage was very sad."

Her Majesty Queen Noor, who has been at the King's bedside since he fell ill, sat next to the Monarch in the plane, occasionally comforting him.

Her support for King Hussein, 63, has been unfailing.

Five of his 11 children from four marriages flew back with him — Their Royal Highnesses Princess Haya, Prince Hamzeh, Prince Hashem, Princess Eman and Princess Raya.

"His Majesty had expressed his wish to return home, if things got to that point [unconsciousness and a failed operation]," Muasher said.

"When members of the Royal Family received a full report from his doctors on His Majesty's condition they consulted and decided to return home upon the King's wish," he added.

Television footage showed Queen Noor and the three princesses dressed in black as they boarded the Royal jet, Saqr (Falcon) Quraish, named after the tribe of the Prophet Mohammad from which the monarch traces his descent.

King Hussein rushed back to the clinic on Jan. 26 after suffering a relapse of cancer — just one week after he made a triumphant return to Jordan following six months of chemotherapy.

During the flight, a confident and visibly composed Queen Noor, who has been the King's wife and confidant for 20 years, allowed aides and guards to pay their respects to the King, who was on a life support system, Muasher said.

Each of them entered the section where the King slept and spent some time with him.

"It was a very dignified moment which no one will ever forget" said Muasher.

In keeping with the King's tradition during all Royal flights, the Queen often walked down the aisle to check on the accompanying party and chat with them.

"In the last 10 days at Mayo, Queen Noor did not leave the hospital for a minute in order to stay at the King's bedside," Muasher said.

After his arrival in Amman on Friday morning, the King was rushed in an ambulance to the King Hussein Medical Centre to continue his treatment.

His private physician, Samir Farraj, on Saturday described the monarch's condition as stable, saying his heart and brain were both "intact."

It was the first official medical report on the King's health made public since his unexpected return to Jordan.

But the King, who was declared unable to carry out his duties on Saturday, "is still under intensive care" at the medical centre.

"Due to the accelerated relapse of the lymphoma, His Majesty had difficulty in breathing which required putting him on a ventilator and under sedation," the statement said.

"In addition, there is failure in the function of his only kidney and liver," Farraj said in a statement.

King Hussein had one kidney removed in 1992 after a cancer scare.

"The heart and brain remain intact, and the general condition is stable."

Her Majesty Queen Noor and Their Royal Highnesses Princes Faisal, Ali, Hamzeh and Hashem among well-wishers in front of the King Hussein Medical Centre on Saturday

Parliament holds ordinary session today

Jordanians, Arabs keep the vigil at hospital gate

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — Parliament Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali Saturday dismissed speculation that Parliament was about to convene to proclaim HRH Crown Prince Abdullah as King.

"His Majesty King Hussein is in critical condition. There will be no measures for the time being, unless developments warrant it," said Majali, referring to developments concerning the King's health.

Earlier Saturday, the Council of Ministers named Prince Abdullah as Regent following medical reports that the King was unable to assume his duties.

Information Minister Nasser Judeh told a press conference that the Cabinet made the decision in accordance with the Constitution.

Judeh added that Prince Abdullah took the oath as the Regent following the Cabinet's decision at a session convened especially to discuss the issue.

"Only after the King passes away will the new King take the oath before both Houses of Parliament and thus become King," Majali said.

Majali said Saturday consultations with Lower House members were neither "exceptional nor emergency. We hold such gatherings on a daily basis."

The speaker said he expected no dramatic changes in the country after King Hussein.

Parliament sources said today's session of the House will be dedicated to discussing the King's illness, and to "pray to God to save and cure him."

Meanwhile, hundreds of Jordanians gathered for a second day at King Hussein Medical Centre where the Monarch is being treated.

People, carrying the King's picture and Jordanian flags, crowded the main gate of the facility when members of the Royal Family emerged from the hospital.

Her Majesty Queen Noor, Their Royal Highnesses Princes Faisal, Ali, Hamzeh and Hashem, greeted well-wishers and shook the hands of the hundreds who rushed to greet them and express sympathy.

People prayed for the King, and held candles while standing on the pavement near the main gate.

Joining the vigil were many Arab nationals, mainly Egyptians.

"I, my wife and my four daughters have come here to share with our Jordanian brothers their feelings and prayers for the King's safety," said one Egyptian national, who asked not to be named.

"I was on my way to receive treatment abroad at the King's expense, but I cancelled my trip for the sake of Al Hussein," read one banner that was carried by a Jordanian young man.

Delegation heads to Sanaa

AMMAN (J.T.) — A high-level economic delegation including economists and businessmen is today heading for the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, to discuss ways to promote trade exchange and investment projects.

The delegation, to be headed by Minister of Industry and Trade Mohammad Saleh Hourani, includes representatives of 34 Jordanian businesses and industrial organisations as well as Jordanian hospitals, according to Ministry of Industry and Trade sources quoted by al Ra'i Arabic daily Saturday.

The ministry said that during the visit, officials will be negotiating an increase in Jordan's exports to Yemen and expanding existing markets for Jordanian goods.

Hourani was quoted as saying that Jordan and Yemen are bound by a number of trade and economic ties initiated during successive Jordanian-Yemeni higher committee meetings, the last of which was held in Amman in November 1998.

He said the delegation talks will also cover cooperation in the health, educational, judicial and other fields.

According to the minister, Jordan exported to Yemen JD7.3 million of goods in 1994, which rose to JD13.4 million in 1997. Exports included ready-made garments, textile products, construction materials, foodstuffs, chemical, pharmaceutical and veterinary products, in addition to home appliances.

Jordan imports Yemeni fish, coffee and spices.

Foreign spouses share fond memories of King Hussein

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — Western women married to Jordanians have fond memories of His Majesty King Hussein, who helped transform the country from a tiny desert state to a modern Kingdom during his 47-year reign.

Most of them met their husbands as students in universities across the United States, Europe the eastren Europe over the last four decades, and settled in Jordan to look after their families and to continue their careers.

Many of them witnessed the turbulences through which the country has passed since the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, and like 80 per cent of the Jordanians, they have known no other leader than King Hussein.

Rosmarie Ehrhardht, a mother of three who arrived in Jordan from Gemany in 1962 after tying the knot with a Jordanian, said she was shocked to find a small capital with a few shops and restaurants.

"Now, Jordan has become just as advanced as any modern European country, but unlike the estranged societies of industrialised countries, Jordanians have managed to keep a close social network and to act like one big family, thanks to the efforts of His Majesty King Hussein."

Ehrhardt also recalled how she came across King Hussein while she was vacationing with her family in Aqaba in 1965.

"King Hussein was driving his jeep near the beach when he spotted me and stopped to greet me, he told me, 'Welcome to Jordan.'"

As with others, news of the sudden deterioration in the King's health generated deep feelings of pain, distress and grief.

"I feel very sad now, because the King built the country and became a father of the whole nation," Ehrhardt said.

On Saturday, she joined thousands of grieving Jordanians in prayers that went late into the night outside the King Hussein medical centre, where the King was in critical condition after losing his seven-month battle with cancer.

U.S.-born Ann Sawalha said life in Amman "was very simple" when she arrived here in 1959, seven years after His Majesty was proclaimed King.

"There were around 200,000 people living in the capital and it was very small," she recalled. Today, Amman, a cpital with a modern infrastructure, is home to over one million people.

"And if you wanted to go to the 5th Circle (now the heart of the capital), you had to take water supplies with you," Sawalha added.

"Jordan is a beautiful country, in which I raised my children proudly."

Sawalha said she met King Hussein twice during these years. "I learned that the King is a part of the Jordanian family."

Ruth Tell, a paediatrician, said society in Jordan was similar to that in her British hometown when she left it to settle with her husband in 1959.

But she was shocked, because unlike what she had been told about the country's relatively pleasant weather conditions, she arrived in the middle of a snow storm.

"The capital was a small town...and everybody knew each other. There was nothing after the First Circle. But now Amman is a big city," Tell said.

"It was a big challenge for me to start work as a doctor with limited medical infrastructure," she added.

She said she met King Hussein during his frequent visits to child care institutions where he always checked on their needs.

"I was relaxed when I first met him. He was young and handsome," she said.

For Satasha Abu Sham, who came to Amman from Slovenia 33 years ago, people were more conservative and the economic situation was better.

"There was no gap between the rich and poor people, no traffic jams and girls used not to wear trousers," said Abu Sham.

But for her, "King Hussein remains the best leader in the world."

Whats Going On

Film

- "Que la bête meure" at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh on Monday Feb. 8 at 6:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.

Concert

- Musical performance by pianist Saleem Abboud Ashkar at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m. (Performance includes pieces by Beethoven, Schubert, Bach, Chopin, and Schumann).

Lectures

- "The Palestinian Status at the End of the Century" by Dr. Ibrahim Abu Lughud at Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, Jabal Amman on Monday Feb. 8 at 6:30 p.m.
- Lecture by writer Mahmoud Rimawi about his experince in writing at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh at 6:00 p.m.

Exhibitions

- Paintings by Olivier Debré at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh, until Feb. 25.
- "Winter 1998" exhibition at the Arts Centre, Shmeisani (Tel. 5529610), until Feb. 14
- Works by Mohammad Al Saifi at Books@Café, Jabal Amman, until Feb. 13 (Tel. 4650457).
- The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2), until Feb. 25.

Jordanians frustrated at lack of information during trying times

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Jordanians' anxiety and sadness over His Majesty King Hussein's health has been exacerbated by the failure of the local media to adequately cover development and the failure of officials to keep the media informed, news observers have said over the past few days.

When local papers first announced that King Hussein had returned to Amman to "continue treatment" for a non-Hodgkins lymphoma infecting his body since last July, news broadcast around the world reported regularly throughout the night on the monarch's health, finally announcing that His Majesty had suffered severe organ failure and was unlikely to survive his traumatic ordeal. Shortly after, international organisations reported that he was being sustained by a life support system.

After two agonising days of anticipating long-awaited news of King Hussein's health, Jordanians said they were bitter, in fact outraged, at the media's failure to truthfully depict the reality of King Hussein's situation and at what appeared to be a total news blackout on the local media. They assert that that, in times of crisis, they should be the first to know the news of their own country, not the last.

"The papers said that the King was coming back for treatment," said a tearful 27-year-old Ruba, a teacher. "Everyone else is saying the opposite, that he is coming back [for the last time]. It is clear. We know what His Majesty is going through. We know he will die. Why does our government do this to us?"

Both Al Ra'i and Al Dustour, partially owned by the government, reprinted a story circulated by the Jordan News Agency (Petra) quoting a Royal Court statement. The independently owned Al Arab Al Yawm featured an indepth story on King Hussein's health, detailing the developments of the last seven months.

Friday and Saturday, as international satellite stations issued regular updates of heartbreaking news, Jordan Radio and Television played down developments: Channel One did not give its regular 3:00 p.m. news broadcast Friday, while Radio Jordan's English channel played pop music throughout the afternoon. At 4:30 p.m., after doctors had already declared that King Hussein had suffered kidney and liver failure, officials speaking on Jordan Television said only that his situation was "very critical."

Only yesterday did the Royal Medical Service or the government confirm that he had suffered organ failure.

"What has been told to us is not exactly a lie," said one journalist. "But it's not exactly the truth either."

The last two weeks have witnessed two of the most dramatic events in the history of Jordan — King Hussein's triumphant return to the Kingdom after a six-month battle with cancer in the United States and his subsequent decision to designate his eldest son, Prince Abdullah, as Crown Prince and heir to the Hashemite Throne. But the local media's near total failure to cover the latter, had already began to rupture many Jordanians faith in the official and semi-official media.

While newspaper readers and television viewers blamed the media for not being courageous enough to address a subject that until recently has been taboo, journalists and editors blamed the government for deliberately imposing a near blackout on local media institutions while leaking news to foreign media.

"Of course, [the media] is always extra careful when dealing with such sensitive stories. But it is ridiculous that Jordanians have to listen to the international media to learn about the most important aspect of their lives," said one journalist who asked not to be named. "It is unacceptable. The government must change its policy [of not disclosing information]."

"The government has also actively told the local press to 'take it easy.'" said the journalist. "They have emphasised to the local media that the King was returning to 'continue treatment' and the press feared writing anything to the contrary in fear of making a mistake," he continued, referring to the numerous rumours that circulated along side breaking news about the King's health and about the change to the succession." Only yesterday did the government host its first official press conference, with Minister of Information Nasser Judeh fielding questions on King Hussein's health and the Constitutional procedures taken by the Cabinet yesterday that enlisted Crown Prince Abdullah as Regent.

One well-placed foreign observer described the media's coverage as "unfortunate."

"We are relying entirely on satellite and foreign radio services," the observer said Friday. "Until a few hours ago, there was a discrepancy in the information coming from the local media and the foreign media. Until the Royal Court issued a statement, there was a lot of speculation. Some people believed that the King had already passed away."

Speculation, he said, was instigated by a lack of transparency during the days leading to the change in the succession, and silence, apparently from both the media and the government, allowed speculation to flourish after King Hussein returned to the United States.

"Only Al Arab Al Yawm was trying to keep people informed," he said. "But they too have relied heavily on foreign wire reports. This does not allow people to feel comfortable with what is happening. To the contrary, it makes them nervous and opens the door to unfounded rumours."

Many have said that silence has simply become part of the political culture and something to which they have become accustomed.

"[The government and the media] were confused and didn't know what to do becaue the magnitude of what is happening is very overwhelming," said one businessman. "Therefore, no one could decide how to go about things, and took the safest way out, which is not to say anything.

"Our media is trained to not do anything without heirarchical clarification, so they didn't know where to go or what to do," he said.

Kosovo talks set to start after Belgrade climbs down on KLA

RAMBOUILLET, France (AFP) — Talks to resolve the Kosovo conflict were set to proceed Saturday after Belgrade backed down on its refusal to let Kosovo Albanian guerrillas attend.

The entire Kosovo Albanian delegation, including three representatives of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), left Kosovo's capital Pristina at mid-day for Paris aboard two French aircraft.

The start of the talks at Rambouillet castle, outside Paris, was reset for 6:00 p.m. (1700 GMT), three hours later than had been originally planned, the French foreign ministry said.

The six-power Contact Group on the former Yugoslavia has ordered the warring sides to finalise a deal before Feb. 20.

If they fail, NATO air strikes could follow, as the United States and its European allies try to keep a lid on the explosive conflict in the heart of the Balkans.

French President Jacques Chirac is to formally open the talks, after which the delegations and their U.S. and European mediators will remain in total seclusion until a deal is realised.

The Kosovo Albanians' departure from Pristina was delayed by a day after Serbian authorities refused to allow KLA members to board a French flight Friday, saying they did not want to see "terrorists" at the talks.

The KLA is sending a total of five delegates to Rambouillet, of whom two were already abroad.

Saturday, Albanian and Serbian sources said Belgrade was still adamant in its refusal to meet face to face with the KLA, vanguard of a year-old armed struggle for Kosovo's independence.

"We have said that there should be no talks with terrorists," a Serb source said.

"The Albanians have to decide whether they would like to be represented at such important talks by criminals or politicians," he said.

An Albanian source said three independent members of the Kosovar delegation may act as mediators, shuttling between the Belgrade delegates and the five-member KLA team to try to get them to reach a settlement.

About a dozen KLA supporters were seen outside the Rambouillet castle gates Saturday chanting slogans as the talks' co-chairmen, French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine and his British counterpart, Robin Cook, arrived.

A French diplomatic source expected more "huge disagreements" to arise once the talks finally got underway.

"Each side is looking at the advantage of walking out," he said. "They are all coming here because they didn't want to be blamed for scuttling the talks."

At the heart of the talks is a Contact Group blueprint that would give Kosovo and its ethnic Albanian majority a high degree of autonomy within the rump Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) for a three-year period.

Overseeing the peace settlement, should it be struck, will be an international armed presence of up to 30,000 troops, the majority from Europe.

Belgrade rejects any foreign troops on its soil, and the issue is expected to be a major point of discussion.

Christopher Hill, the U.S. and Contact Group mediator to the talks, said another key issue will be a long-term settlement of Kosovo's status, beyond the three-year interim period.

"Suffice it to say that we have to find a mechanism after three years that both parties can live with," he said.

As part of what French diplomats are calling "le forcing diplomatique," the castle has been declared off-limits to the public, and large numbers of riot police are in the vicinity.

French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine (right) gestures as he talks with his British counterpart Robin Cook in the grounds of the Rambouillet Chateau as they wait for the start of the Kosovo peace talks due to begin. The start of the talks has been delayed due to the late arrivals of delegations at the castle outside Paris (Reuters photo)

'Germany ready to act with NATO over Kosovo'

MUNICH, Germany (AFP) — Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder said here Saturday that Germany would as a reliable Western ally take part in any eventual international military action to stop killing in Kosovo.

His comments came as peace talks were set to begin in Rambouillet, France, with NATO saying it is ready for airstrikes if necessary to stop Serbian and separatist ethnic Albanian forces from fighting each other in the Serbian province of Kosovo.

Speaking to a defence forum here, Schroeder said: "Let there be no mistake: The international community is absolutely serious about preventing any further violation of human rights or any more killings in Kosovo.

"We know that this process will have to be shored up militarily. Germany will make its contribution towards this effort," Schroeder said.

Schroeder also repeated his warnings of European Union expansion ahead of a consolidation of EU finances.

And about NATO, he said no new countries would get an invitation to join the Alliance at its 50th anniversary summit, after admitting Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

Schroeder said NATO needed to consolidate, absorbing its three newest members, before moving to include other countries.

"There will be no concrete decisions about the beginning of new negotiations" at the summit in Washington in April, Schroeder told the Munich conference on security policy.

Schroeder said concerning an eventual peacekeeping force for Kosovo: "We know it is also in America's interest that Europe is willing to assume more responsibility in foreign and security policy.

"That is my understanding of (U.S.) Defence Minister (William) Cohen's announcement that the U.S. would only contribute a very limited contingent to the mission required to enforce a future Kosovo peace agreement," Schroder said.

But German opposition leader Wolfgang Schaeuble said American presence was essential in any NATO peacekeeping. "The pressure is much greater if you have American involvement. You have much more clout there.

"An implementation force is inconceivable without American involvement."

A NATO-led peacekeeping force for Kosovo comprised of some 25,000 to 30,000 troops is shaping up, with European countries ready to provide the lion's share of troops.

Washington has said as many as 4,000 U.S. troops might participate in such a force if the warring sides in Kosovo reached an agreement, but U.S. leaders have emphasised that there must be a "permissive environment".

Already, Britain has put 8,000 troops on standby, 6,000 of which would be deployed in Kosovo proper.

As the largest troop contributor, Britain would lead day-to-day operations in Kosovo although NATO's commander of European forces, U.S. General Wesley Clark, will retain overall command of the mission.

France has said it will provide 5,000 forces to the mission while Germany will contribute 3,000 troops. For the first time, German Leopard II tanks would be deployed on foreign soil as part of the NATO extraction force based in Macedonia.

Russia and other east European countries such as NATO newcomers Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary are also expected to provide peacekeepers to the mission.

The "Munich Conference on Security Policy", also known as the Wehrkunde, meeting here this weekend is considered the military equivalent of the Davos economic forum that is held annually in Switzerland.

The U.S. defence secretary was to address the conference later Saturday.

For the first time, there would be an Asian representation, with Chinese foreign minister official Mei Zhaorong, Indian national security advisor Brajesh Mishra and a Japanese official speaking.

The Munich conference has been staged yearly since 1963, except for 1997 due to organisational problems, and was founded by the German editor Ewald von Kleist, who as a German army officer was a leader of opposition to Hitler in the waning years of the war.

NY City leaders outraged by police shooting of immigrant

NEW YORK (AP) — The Justice Department and local prosecutors say they will investigate the death of a 22-year-old immigrant from Guinea whom police killed in a barrage of bullets.

Four officers fired 41 shots at Amadou Diallo, who was struck 19 times in the vestibule of his home in the Bronx section of New York City, according to the medical examiner's report.

U.S. Attorney Mary Jo White said Friday her office would investigate the case along with the Bronx district attorney.

Family and friends encouraged federal officials to review the shooting, which they called an execution.

"This was not a police murder, it was a police slaughter," said the Rev. Al Sharpton, civil rights activist. "If a man was put in front of a firing squad, he would not expect to be shot at 41 times."

Some have suggested race was a possible factor for the shooting that took place early Thursday — Diallo was black, the four officers are white.

"Africans are murdered in this town every single month," said Sidique Wai, president of the United African Congress.

"And it's a fact now — something we are sick and tired of."

Police Commissioner Howard Safir said officials still don't know exactly what happened because there were no civilian witnesses and investigators have not talked to the officers yet.

The Bronx district attorney's office has asked police not to interview the officers until their investigation is completed.

"They took what they felt to be, and feel to be, appropriate police action," said the officers' lawyer, Stephen Worth.

"I think it will likely develop that Mr. Diallo had a language barrier which prevented him from understanding and complying with the officers' orders and made him continue to act in an aggressive manner towards the police officers."

Diallo's roommates said he spoke English well but slowly, and had a stutter.

Flagpole protest in N. Zealand

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Indigenous Maori tribe protesters in New Zealand climbed a ceremonial flagpole Saturday on the grounds of the historic Waitangi Treaty House and replaced official flags with pro-self rule flags.

The protest move came after uncharacteristically calm celebrations and meetings marking a national day holiday Saturday known as Waitangi Day.

The Waitangi flagpole has become a symbol of sovereignty for the government and of defiance for members of Maori tribes who nurse grievances over lost lands, fisheries, forests and culture.

In 1840, feared Maori chief Hone Heke chopped down the flagpole three times because it symbolised British rule over his people.

In recent years, Waitangi celebrations have become a focus for disruptive protests, and the flagpole is a favoured target of Maori activists.

Violent demonstrations forced the government in 1995 to abandon its official celebrations of the signing of the treaty between Maori tribes and the British Crown, which made New Zealand a British colony in 1840.

Saturday, the New Zealand flag and the navy White Ensign were unceremoniously lowered by three Maori activists who climbed the greased flagpole. Police did nothing to stop the protest action.

Protesters replaced the two official flags with seven flags of the Maori sovereignty movement.

Pita Paraone, the chairman of the Waitangi Day organising committee, said the incident would not spoil the spirit of commemorations.

"The spirit of the last two days has been such that if they are able to fly their flag, then let them do it," Paraone said.

Activist spokesperson Annette Sykes paid tribute to the "warriors" who climbed the flagstaff, and hauled down the flags.

Philippine leader wants drug traffickers executed after child rapist

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — A day after the Philippines put a child rapist to death, President Joseph Estrada said Saturday that his country should execute drug traffickers next.

Friday, Leo Echegaray, convicted of raping his stepdaughter, was put to death by lethal injection in the first execution in the Philippines in 23 years.

Estrada repeatedly denied appeals for clemency or pardon for Echegaray, including those from the Amnesty International, the European Union and the Vatican.

"If I had my way, drug users and traffickers should be next because almost all crimes are drug-related," Estrada said during his weekly radio programme. "That is destroying the future of our youth so we have to impose stiff punishment."

About 2 million Filipinos, or 2.8 per cent of the population, are drug users, according to police figures.

Echegaray's wife, Zenaida, had denounced Estrada's refusal to review the charges against her husband, who had maintained his innocence. She said Estrada has a "heart of stone."

"Mrs. Echegaray should understand that a president has a sworn duty to implement the law. And this should serve as a warning to other criminals," Estrada said.

Neighbours of Echegaray in a poor community in suburban Quezon City hung a large banner across an alley where his family lives which read: "Oppose the death penalty."

Inside his casket, Echegaray wore a traditional white Filipino "barong" shirt with a button saying "Execute justice not people."

The leftwing Solidarity of Filipino Workers labour group challenged Estrada to also show no mercy to the widow of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Imelda, and to business tycoon Lucio Tan, who is facing charges of evading payment of millions of dollars in taxes.

"The plunderer Imelda and the anti-worker and tax-cheat Lucio Tan are animals far worse than Leo," the group said in a statement. "But instead of prosecution, these people are getting blanket protection from the Estrada administration."

The group cited the Estrada government's efforts to seek a legal settlement sharing the allegedly ill-gotten wealth of the Marcoses and the lack of support in the internal revenue agency for efforts to prosecute Tan, who supported Estrada's election campaign.

Echegaray was the first to be executed among 915 death-row convicts.

The debate over the death penalty has divided the nation, but many Filipinos favour capital punishment because of rising crime.

The Philippine constitution abolished the death penalty in 1987 but allowed congress to impose it for "heinous" crimes.

A law which took effect in January 1994 restored the death penalty for murder, kidnapping, rape and drug trafficking.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Schroeder warns about U.S. food aid to Russia

MUNICH, Germany (AFP) — German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder warned here Saturday that U.S. exports of surplus food to Russia might be destroying the remaining healthy parts of the Russian agricultural system. He said the result of such aid might be that Russia's "last intact agricultural structures are ruined." Schroeder told the Wehrkunde forum in Munich on international security that international aid to Russia may be targeted not properly, and sometimes offend local sensibilities. "The International Monetary Fund should investigate whether past ideas or measures were always handled with the necessary measure of sensitivity," Schroeder said, referring to the need to respect Russian history, culture and society in giving aid. Schroeder did not give details but said he had the "impression that sometimes money spent and money given is not put into the right places." Schroeder has said that Germany will not increase its aid to Russia until Moscow carries out reforms to remedy its financial crises. He said however that one solution for Germany might be "to look at specific projects" where it was sure money would be effective and used properly.

Pakistan, India schedule next round of talks

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — Pakistan has agreed to a fresh round of talks with India in New Delhi starting Feb. 18, the official news agency APP said Saturday. Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmad will reach New Delhi on Feb. 17 for three days of talks with his Indian counterpart K. Ragunath, it said. The three-day meeting will focus on the issues of peace and security, including confidence-building measures, and the thorny dispute over the Himalayan region of Kashmir. Three previous rounds since the South Asian rivals resumed bilateral dialogue last year after more than a year failed to break a deadlock over Kashmir. Kashmir, divided between the two countries and claimed by both, has caused two of the three wars between the two countries since they gained independence from Britain in 1947. Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz said here Thursday prospects for raising the dialogue to a higher political level would depend on a tangible movement toward tackling the "core" issue of Kashmir. The two countries have started a process to improve the atmosphere by reviving sporting contacts and initiating a cross-border bus service in addition to existing air and train links. Indian Prime Minster Atal Behari Vajpayee plans to visit Pakistan on the inaugural run of the bus service for which a date is yet to be decided. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has welcomed the move.

Chinese activist detained

BEIJING (AP) — Police in China Saturday detained an activist who helped set up a branch of a banned opposition political party two days earlier, a human rights group said. Wang Zechen's detention came after he and others Thursday announced the establishment of the Liaoning provincial branch of the China Democracy Party, the Hong Kong-based Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said. Branches also were established in four other parts of the country Saturday in defiance of the government's crackdown on the would-be opposition party. Activists now have set up at least 16 branches since the party was founded in June. Three of its most prominent members were put on trial for trying to subvert China's communist system and sentenced to terms of 11 to 13 years in prison. In another development, activists Saturday set up a committee to coordinate the work of the branches in the cities of Beijing, Wuhan and Tianjin, the provinces of Liaoning, Shaanxi, Henan and Hebei, and North America, said its executive chairman, Zha Jianguo. The group named Xu Wenli, Qin Yongmin and Wang Youcai, the three party leaders now serving prison sentences, and Wang Xizhe, a longtime activist in exile in the United States, as chairmen. Eleven activists in China will hold rotating three-month terms as head of the group's executive committee, Zha said.

Gates gives $3.3b to foundations

WASHINGTON (R) — Bill Gates, co-founder of software giant Microsoft Corp. and his wife, Melinda, have given $3.3 billion to their two foundations, reports said Saturday. Fortune magazine's online report and the New York Times said the world's richest person donated $2.2 billion to the William H. Gates Foundation and $1.1 billion to the Gates Learning Foundation. The William H. Gates Foundation focuses on world health and population issues as well as other causes. Its endowment with the new gift totals more than $4 billion, the reports said. The Gates Learning Foundation, formerly known as the Gates Library Foundation, has concentrated on providing computers to public libraries in low income areas. With an endowment of $1.3 billion after the latest donation, the Learning Foundation will expand its scope to include education and overseas projects, the reports said. The gifts, made on Jan. 29, were not announced. The Gates' announced in December that the William H. Gates Foundation would donate $100 million to a non-profit health group in Seattle to improve distribution of child vaccines in developing countries.

20 killed in Kashmir gunbattles

SRINAGAR, India (R) — Twenty people, including 11 separatist guerrillas and four Indian soldiers, were killed in gunbattles in India's troubled Kashmir valley, police said Saturday. Nearly a dozen militant groups are fighting for Kashmir's independence or merger with neighbouring Pakistan. India, which controls two-thirds of Kashmir, accuses Pakistan of arming and training Kashmiri separatist guerrillas and "foreign mercenaries". Pakistan, which rules the remaining one third, says it only provides political and diplomatic support for the Kashmiri people in their "struggle for self-determination". More than 25,000 people have been killed in the nine-year-old rebellion in the Himalayan region. In the latest clashes, three guerrillas, one soldier and five civilians were killed in a clash Saturday some 97 km south-east of Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir. Friday evening, four guerrillas and three Indian security personnel were killed in an another battle about 480 km southwest of Srinagar, police said. In an another incident, Indian soldiers shot dead three militants near the Pakistani border. Another guerrilla was gunned down by Indian security forces in the Poonch area of Jammu region. Jammu is the winter capital of the restive state.

Malaysian police detain supporter of opposition party

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) — A supporter of Malaysia's Islamic party was detained for disobeying police orders not to peddle newspapers outside a major shopping complex, witnesses said Saturday.

"Police warned the middle aged man not to peddle the Harakah newspaper. An argument broke out followed by a heated exchange. The peddler then kicked a policeman," an AFP photographer said.

"More policemen rushed to overpower the man who was then taken away," he added.

Harakah, a tabloid which is printed twice a week is the official news organ of the opposition Parti Islam Malaysia which rules the northeastern state of Kelantan.

The government had declared the selling of the newspaper, whose sales had surged recently, to non-party members illegal.

Earlier, police dispersed a small crowd which chanted "Reformasi," at a popular intersection in the heart of the city.

"Police moved in swiftly and warned the pro-Anwar supporters not to gather and to go into the shopping complex. It was all over in five minutes," he added.

About 100 policemen with sidearms were deployed to maintain law and order. Fresh street protests have emerged in Kuala Lumpur particularly after Anwar Ibrahim was ordered to make his defence.

Anwar, the 51-year-old former deputy leader who was sacked and arrested in September, is on trial on four charges of corruption — abusing his position to order police to quash sexual misconduct allegations against him.

After a controversial 50-day hearing, the High Court last week ruled that the prosecution had established a case against Anwar and ordered him to enter his defence from Feb. 8.

Anwar also faces another corruption charge and five counts of sodomy, all of which he dismisses as part of a political conspiracy to oust him.

An old Russian WW II veteran leans on his walking stick as he sits begging at a railway station in St. Petersburg. The monthly pension of Russian pensioners is equal $20 (AFP photo)

Indonesian military gets shoot-on-sight orders

JAKARTA (AFP) — The Indonesian military has been given orders to shoot-on-sight in a bid to stamp out violence, Indonesian armed forces chief General Wiranto told reporters Saturday.

"An order to shoot-on-sight will be imposed for the whole of Indonesia, especially in areas prone to unrest, to protect the population from actions that destroy national assets or that (lead to) physical assault on others, that engage in robbery or resist law personnel," Wiranto added.

The decision came in the wake of continued unrest, looting and mob violence in different regions which has left more than 100 dead and caused massive destruction.

"ABRI declares war on all forms of violence ... ABRI will take firm and decisive measures to protect society," Wiranto told a press conference here referring to the armed forces' popular acronym, ABRI.

He stressed the shoot-on-sight order would remain in force as long as necessary saying: "Violence and forms of assault have now destroyed national assets.

"This needs special therapies, this needs specific handling," he said, adding the security forces could not longer simply rely on its local personnel, especially in isolated regions, to prevent and contain unrest.

Therefore, the military would set up a "special task force" to face "the actions of our own society which has forgotten that the law should be respected and that their actions can cause losses to the rest of society."

He cited cases of violent fights between large groups of people, the torching and vandalising of public buildings, including places of worship.

He said the task force would "prevent the spread of such actions."

The task force, Wiranto said would be empowered to undertake "repressive actions", to seek out the root cause of unrest to ensure adequate punishment.

He did not elaborate but said the task force would soon be operational.

The Indonesian armed forces, which includes the police, have been coming under fire for failing to prevent or to quickly contain the violence that has rocked several regions of Indonesia in the past months.

In one of the most bloody incidents in recent years, at least 95 people were killed in several days of violent clashes between Muslim and Christian communities in the eastern province of Maluku last month.

Fighting between villages and large mass groups, the looting of state and private properties by mobs and rising violent crime have also been reported across the country in the past months.

Major General Dai Bachtiar, who heads the national police detective command, said police were currently processing at least 606 suspects for involvement in four major unrest cases.

The bulk were involved in the series of killings in Banyuwangi district in East Java last year.

Prepare to govern, India's Sonia tells Congress

NEW DELHI (R) — Sonia Gandhi, leader of India's main opposition Congress party, has told her party workers they should prepare for government because the ruling coalition is crumbling.

"Confidence in the ability of the government to govern is at its lowest ebb ever, both at home and abroad," Sonia, as she is popularly known, said in a letter to Congress workers in the latest issue of the party's monthly journal.

"We therefore have to ready ourselves for responsibilities which, perhaps sooner rather than later, will fall upon us," said the Italian-born widow of assassinated former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. "I have every confidence that our rejuvenated party will rise to the occasion".

Local newspapers Saturday quoted Sonia as saying, in the southern state of Karnataka, that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's government might "fall any time" and that her party would not "stand and watch".

The Hindustan Times newspaper quoted Sonia as saying that Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government was in danger of collapsing.

"Doubts are being raised whether the government will be able to pass its second budget, due to be presented on Feb. 27," the Times of India newspaper said.

In her letter, Sonia accused the ruling Hindu nationalists of victimising supporters of other faiths. "The BJP represents forces of vicious reaction, which in the name of religion are targeting votaries of other religions," she said.

Repeated attacks on Christian chapels in the western state of Gujarat and the murder of an Australian missionary and his two sons in the eastern state of Orissa by Hindu hardliners allied to the BJP have shaken the country's minority community.

Political squabbles have surfaced frequently since last March, when Vajpayee's coalition was formed. Relations between the coalition allies are turbulent, and wrangling between hardliners and moderates within the BJP have also mounted.

Hindu rightists say they are threatened

NEW DELHI, India (AP) — Hindu rightists say it is their religion that is threatened, though it is Christians who have been the target of a string of attacks in India.

Newspapers reported Saturday that at a meeting in the western city of Ahmedabad, leaders of the Vishnu Hindu Parishad, or World Hindu Council, passed a resolution accusing Christian missionaries of forcing Hindus to convert.

The Pioneer newspaper quoted Friday's resolution as declaring "the unity and integrity of the country is threatened by Christian missionaries ...."

VHP working president Ashok Singhal was quoted by The Times of India as urging leaders in Ahmedabad, 920 kilometres west of New Delhi, to guide Hindus at a time when their "religion, community and culture are facing a grave threat."

The convention called for a ban on conversions and said the government should investigate foreign funding of church work it described as part of an international conspiracy against India.

The VHP is closely linked to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party. Vajpayee's initial calls for a national discussion on conversions appeared to bolster the VHP's argument that Christians themselves were to blame for the attacks they have faced, but the prime minister has recently taken a harder stand against the violence.

Saturday, Alan de Lastic, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Delhi, said banning conversions would be inhuman. "Conversion is a personal act," the archbishop told reporters in New Delhi, reiterating there have been no forcible conversions to Christianity in India.

He also said Christians were living in a state of fear because the government failed to act promptly against those attacking Christians and their property.

Police were yet to arrest those who allegedly raped a Catholic nun in a taxi Thursday in the eastern Indian state of Orissa near to where an Australian missionary and his sons were killed last month, the archbishop said.

Also Saturday, Christians marched silently through the streets of Bhubaneswar, the capital of Orissa state, demanding an inquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation, India's FBI, into the rape incident and the killing of an Australian priest and his two sons, the United News of India news agency said.

Last week, on the 51st anniversary of the death of Indian independence leader Mohandas Gandhi, Vajpayee went on national television to condemn what he called a violation of "the country's tradition and culture of tolerance." Days later, he told reporters he did not believe forced conversions to Christianity were taking place in India.

Christian leaders have also denied they use force or bribes to convert. Christians make up about 2 per cent of India's overwhelmingly Hindu population, which is nearing 1 billion, but have a high profile because missionary-run schools and hospitals are considered among the country's best.

Hindu nationalists have been accused of trying to fan fear of minorities — Christians as well as Muslims — in order to boost political support for the BJP.

Christians have counted more than 100 attacks on their community during the last year.

Police deployed at Sikhism's holiest site

AMRITSAR, India (AP) — Indian police briefly patrolled at Sikhism's holiest temple Saturday, fearing violence could erupt in a power struggle that has deeply divided the religion's leadership.

"Our intention is to maintain peace and protect law and order," Deputy Inspector General of Police Sumnet Goel said after the deployment to the Golden Temple of 400 officers armed with pistols and clubs.

The police arrived before dawn and most withdrew later in the morning. But witnesses said some officers in plain clothes — for Sikhs, traditional turbans and tunics — remained Saturday afternoon inside the two-story temple, which is situated at the centre of a reflecting pool surrounded by a white-marble courtyard.

Police said they would make periodic checks in the area until after a meeting scheduled for Wednesday of the Sikh executive committee. Moderates who control the committee are expected that day to try to oust the religion's high priest, Baba Ranjit Singh.

The high priest is not a member of the 15-member committee, which appointed him. Ten of the members are believed to want Singh out.

It is rare for police to enter the temple complex in Amritsar, and their presence Saturday raised tension in the city 450 kilometres west of New Delhi.

Any clash between Sikhs and security forces would recall the 1984 raid on the temple by Indian troops who flushed out Sikh separatists. Incensed that she had ordered the raid, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards assassinated her months later. Her death set off deadly Hindu-Sikh rioting across India.

Singh has sought to revive the Sikh separatist movement that was crushed in 1993 after more than a decade of fighting and 17,000 deaths.

Moderates support Prakash Singh Badal, a Sikh who as the top elected official of Punjab state, where Amritsar is located, has pledged loyalty to the Indian federal government.

In a show of force last week, Singh called nearly 15,000 of his supporters from across the country to the Golden Temple.

Singh's followers carried swords, pistols and revolvers to the meeting.

In an interview Saturday at his home near the temple, Singh said that by sending in police, Badal was trying to spark a disturbance he could use as a pretext for a crackdown. Singh called on his followers to show restraint, and said he had no intention of trying to disrupt the upcoming executive committee meeting.

Speaking to reporters Saturday in Chandigarh, the state capital 200 kilometres east of Amritsar, Badal denied there were police officers in the temple, which some Sikhs would see as blasphemous. But Badal stressed the importance of maintaining law and order.

Singh, once a simple carpenter with little religious training, was elevated to Sikhism's highest seat in 1990 as he was on trial for the murder of the head of a Sikh offshoot sect.

Singh admits to having killed Baba Gurbachan Singh, saying he acted to protect Sikhism. In 1997 the Indian president pardoned Ranjit Singh.

According to religious custom, most Sikhs take the last name Singh, which means lion, while baba is a title of religious respect.

Their religious teachings say Sikh men must show their faith by several signs, including never cutting their hair and carrying ceremonial daggers to show their readiness to defend the religion. Male followers of the religion, founded in India as a melding of Hindu and Muslim beliefs, keep their long hair wrapped in turbans.

The feud has come to the fore as Sikhs prepare to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the founding of their religion later this year.

In addition, moderate Sikhs at several temples in Canada and the United States have defied a decree issued by Baba Ranjit Singh reiterating the tradition of eating community meals while sitting on the floor. Instead, they have begun using tables and chairs, which has sparked violent protests by hard-liners.

In North America, several moderates have been excommunicated for defying the order. At least three Sikhs have been killed and several more injured in clashes over the issue in Canada and the United States.

Chechen parliament debates adopting Islamic law

GROZNY, Russia (AP) — The Chechen parliament announced Saturday that it will continue to carry out its work despite a presidential decree revoking its legislative powers.

At an emergency meeting, the parliament decided that it would ignore a decree by President Aslan Maskhadov stripping the legislature of power and ordering the body to write an Islamic constitution within three months.

"Today, parliament decided it will continue to work despite the presidential decree," First Deputy Speaker Selim Beshayev told the Interfax news agency.

He said Maskhadov's decree, issued Wednesday, had no force because it violated the constitution of the Chechen republic, which calls for a secular state.

"Parliament will not allow decision which violate the interests of the people," Beshayev said.

He said the parliament did not adopt any formal resolutions at Saturday's meeting because they have not yet received official copies of the presidential decree revoking their powers.

Friday, Maskhadov abolished the post of vice president in the breakaway republic, further caving in to opposition leaders who want Chechenya to become an Islamic state.

Under an Islamic constitution, the republic would fully embrace Islamic law, including the practice of stoning adulterers, beating drug users and alcoholics and severing the hands of thieves.

Opposition leaders have demanded an Islamic state since the republic won de facto independence from Russia in a 1994-96 war, and they have undermined Maskhadov's authority with increased political violence and kidnappings.

Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov is to discuss the situation in Chechenya at a meeting in Moscow in the next few days, First Vice Premier Vadim Gustov said Saturday, according to Russian news reports.

Gustov was leading a meeting Saturday on economic cooperation in Russia's volatile North Caucasus region, which includes Chechenya. The meeting did not address the standoff between Maskhadov and the Chechen parliament, he said.

'Students and teacher sex educative'

LONDON (AFP) — Britain's Chief Inspector of Schools sparked off a row Saturday after saying that sex between teachers and sixth-form college students can be "educative" just as the government is threatening prison sentences for those involved in such liaisons.

Britain's press gave front-page coverage to Chris Woodhead's controversial remarks made after a university debate.

Woodhead warned against such relations but added: "I don't think necessarily that a teacher should be automatically drummed out of the profession," for sexual relations with students.

He said: "I think human beings can get themselves into messes and I think those messes can sometimes be... educative on both sides."

The remarks provoked outcry among opposition politicians and teachers' organisations.

David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, one of the main teachers' unions, said: "If he has made these remarks there must be a substantial question mark over his position."

The government has just presented parliament with a bill proposing prison sentences of up to two years for teachers who have sex with college students, aged between 16 and 17.

Lewinsky takes centre stage at impeachment finale

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Monica Lewinsky took centre stage before the U.S. Senate and world media here Saturday as prosecutors use her videotaped testimony to bolster their case for President Bill Clinton's removal from office.

Blocked by a Senate vote from calling Lewinsky in person, the Republican prosecutors opted for the next best thing — using videotape of her testimony for the three hours they were given for the final presentation of evidence.

Lewinsky will be seen and heard in public discussing intimate details of the affair that sparked a year-long investigation and prompted only the second presidential impeachment trial in U.S. history.

"For the first time, the Senate and the people of the United States of America are going to get a chance to meet Monica Lewinsky the person, not Monica Lewinsky as she has been described by lawyers and spinmeisters," said Republican prosecutor James Rogan Friday.

Videotaped testimony from Clinton confidant Vernon Jordan and White House aide Sidney Blumenthal will also be played. White House lawyers have three hours to rebut evidence and are also entitled to use videotaped excerpts of depositions by the three witnesses.

The case against Clinton is virtually a lost cause because the trial is unlikely to yield the two-thirds majority of Senate votes needed to convict the president and remove him from office.

Still, the Senate's decision Thursday to bar live witnesses but allow use of videotaped testimony will likely draw a spirited performance from the trial's prosecution and defence.

The four trial "managers" who will "definitely" use up the entire three hours they will have to make their side's presentation were likely to focus "more on Monica and Vernon Jordan," a Republican aide said.

White House defence lawyers could draw attention to portions of the 25-year-old woman's deposition, taken Monday at a Washington hotel, that seem to exonerate the embattled but popular leader.

Following Saturday's session, the trial is to reconvene Monday and is scheduled to conclude with a final vote by Feb. 12 or even earlier.

Closing arguments are scheduled for Monday, and senators were due to begin final deliberations Tuesday when each senator is allowed up to 15 minutes to speak. The separate votes on the two articles of impeachment could occur Friday.

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Right on track

IN THE interview that HRH Crown Prince Abdullah, the Regent, gave to the press on Thursday, the Prince outlined his policies on a range of domestic, regional and international issues. The comments of the Regent represent his policy directions on the peace process, Iraq, Iran as well as on the democratic process, political pluralism and freedom of expression in the Kingdom.

With regard to the peace process in the Middle East, Prince Abdullah vowed to follow in the footsteps of his father, His Majesty King Hussein. The Regent pledged to remain a staunch supporter of the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, exactly as King Hussein has done all along. This reassurance will come as good news to all sides interested in the promotion of a full and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

On Iraq, the Prince made it clear that the "traditional" Jordanian policy vis-a-vis Baghdad would remain the same with emphasis on the need to address the pressing humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. The Regent appeared to rule out the prospect of a political rehabilitation of the Iraqi regime, a notion generally shared by many other capitals.

Where the Regent came out strongest and clearest was over his unqualified endorsement of the democratic process in the country. By pledging "more support to the democratic transformation, political pluralism and freedom of expression," the Regent is obviously on the side of democratic forces in the country. This will assure many Jordanians who have often felt that the democratisation process was faltering and that a great deal more needs to be done before we can boast of our commitment to democracy and human rights.

Judging by the interview and by the Prince's conduct of state affairs during the past two weeks, he appears to be in full command of events and issues and promise to maintain Jordan's traditional tone, substance and style of politics. We expect the Regent to be highly successful in his determined efforts to strengthen Jordan's ties with its traditional allies and friends as well as consolidate democracy and human rights.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Fanek said stability does not mean silence and stagnation. Thus, His Majesty King Hussein's call for a comprehensive national review was real practice of stability, to allow change under the umbrella of legitimacy and continuity, added Fanek. If the review of the country's policies and the personalities implementing them had started with King Hussein's return, it would be a renovation that would make stability firmer. But with the King's sudden return for treatment, and after designating his eldest son as heir, the review in these circumstances is not a desperate need. In the current situation, a review now will threaten stability, which should be the priority, and stability can be achieved by continuing the current policies and keeping the people implementing them, said Fanek.

Al Dustour's Mazen Saket said the Ministry of Trade and Industry announced a reduction of the trade protocol volume with Iraq to $190 million from $270 million as a result of the drop in oil prices and the reflection of this drop on imported products from Iraq. It is true that the Jordanian oil "bill" has dropped, but the consequence on the two countries' protocol will have negative effects on the Kingdom's economy and trade, Saket claimed. Reducing $65 million local exports to Iraq means that the sales and budgets of several Jordanian industries, which depend on the Iraqi market, will be affected, according to the writer. The country's economic and industrial sectors have been demanding an increase in the joint protocol, and finding the means for that purpose. The excuse for refusing that demand is the U.N. sanctions against Iraq and the subsequent necessary supervision of any products coming to the country. It seems that Jordan is the only country that implements the U.N resolution, said the writer. Jordan's economy is waiting for decisions and regulations to help it get over the depression and the ministry's move will worsen the problem, Saket concluded.

Economic policies need no revision

Sunday's Economic Pulse

Dr. Fahed Fanek

FOR SOME time last summer, the national dialogue was the favourite topic. It filled the void in our public life for several months. Instead of discussing issues, we engaged in the discussion of the very idea of dialogue itself. Now, overall revision is becoming the favoured topic. Intellectuals would like to reconsider and re-evaluate all our political, economic, and social affairs. The idea of revision is now as well-received as dialogue was before.

Of course, dialogue is in itself a positive activity for a vibrant society, even if it does not realise the desirable results aimed at by one party or another. Likewise revision and re-evaluation are also positive activities, because in time fixation and stagnation leads to an accumulation of mistakes and the situation may become hopeless.

In principle, revision can be applied to all policies. I would like to dwell a little bit on the possible revision in the economic field in particular, if not to agree on change, at least to understand and comprehend what we already have.

The idea of revision, which is currently in circulation, has tempted many commentators to came up with some wild ideas which may not be feasible under the circumstances. One commentator for instance came up with the idea of abolishing income tax altogether and compensating the treasury by raising the rate of sales tax two more percentage points, claiming that such a tax reform would encourage new investments, which in turn will generate jobs and alleviate poverty.

This radical idea is not feasible for two reasons: The first is the social impact. The main objective of income tax, as a direct tax, is not only to generate revenues to the treasury, but also to be an instrument for the redistribution of national income. Income tax is mainly raised from those with a high income, while the poor will benefit from the public expenditure on basic services such as education and public health. To abolish income tax is to give the rich a windfall and to widen the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

The second reason lies in the fact that income tax, unlike other taxes, is required by the Constitution, which also requires the government to impose the tax on an escalating basis, ruling out a flat rate tax.

To remove income tax, or to adopt a flat rate tax is out of question unless the Constitution is amended. We know for sure that the Constitution is not open for amendments now or in the foreseeable future.

In this respect, we claim that the economic policies practised in Jordan during the past ten years were the right policies. They included the liberalisation of the markets, encouraging the private sector to take a lead, removing all monetary restrictions, declaring the JD a convertible currency, reducing the deficit in the budget, the stabilisation of the exchange rate by pegging the JD to the dollar at a fixed rate, accumulating reserves of foreign exchange at the Central Bank, opening up to the world, bringing inflation under control, etc.

All these are well-proven policies that need not be changed or altered. If revision is needed at all, it should not touch the basics but try to find ways and means to intensify them by, for instance, pushing forward the privatisation programme.

Yes, the Jordanian economy is not currently in good shape, it is facing lots of difficulties, especially when it comes to unemployment, poverty and the meagre economic growth. However, there are many reasons for these difficulties. Internal economic policies were not among these reasons, and therefore a radical change of course is not called for.

Milosevic: Heads I win, tails you lose

By Gwynne Dyer

LET ME try to crawl inside the mind of Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic as the hours of the NATO ultimatum on Kosovo tick away, and guess what calculations this ultimate political survivor is making now. Because you may be sure that he doesn't think he's cornered.

MILOSEVIC CALCULATION NUMBER ONE: "If the Kosovo Albanians can't get their act together, I don't have to do anything."

After Milosevic crushed Kosovo's autonomy in 1989 as the key step in his climb to power in Serbia, the territory's 90 per cent Albanian majority voted overwhelmingly for independence in an unauthorised but genuine referendum in 1991. They also elected pacifist writer Ibrahim Rugova to be their president.

Milosevic refused to talk to him, and with the rest of former Yugoslavia aflame (mostly due to Milosevic's policies), the patient, non-violent Albanians of Kosovo were just ignored by everybody else. So eventually, some Kosovars lost patience and started up the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which has been fighting the Serbs for the past year.

The KLA leadership and Rugova barely speak to each other. Either or both of them may refuse to show up as ordered at the peace conference that NATO has summoned for February 6 at Rambouillet, near Paris. And there isn't much the West could do about it if they refuse: as one senior NATO diplomat said: "We can bomb the Serbs, but how do we bomb the KLA?"

So if the KLA and/or Rugova refuse to attend (a response Milosevic tries to encourage by keeping up the pace of the killing in Kosovo), then he's off the hook and NATO looks stupid. Milosevic is no strategist — he has started four wars in former Yugoslavia, and he has already lost three — but when it comes to calculating the next move, he is one of the world's finest tacticians.

MILOSEVIC CALCULATION NUMBER TWO: "If the Kosovars manage to send a united delegation to Rambouillet, I still don't have to show up. At least, not until they bomb me."

NATO, after all, is famous for issuing blood-curdling threats against Balkan mass murderers (most of them working for Milosevic) that just sort of drifted away after a while. They swear that this time it's different — but the Contact Group that is organising Rambouillet includes Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov.

The Western alliance desperately wants this common front to survive, and Primakov is a sensible man who carries no torch for the Serbs. But he wants to be elected president of Russia next year, and Russians are so instinctively anti-Muslim that they will back even the most monstrous and bloodstained Slav aggressor (i.e. Milosevic) against any Muslims, however innocent. They simply cannot imagine Slavs as aggressors and Muslims as victims.

So if NATO's bombers fly, they will do it without the blessing of the Contact Group that has actually convened the Rambouillet conference. This diplomatic awkwardness is surmountable, but it would take some time — and all Milosevic is ever playing for is time. Win enough time, and you die of old age, still in power.

MILOSEVIC CALCULATION NUMBER THREE: "If NATO drops a few bombs on Serbia, it won't hurt me. It might even help."

The talk on the street in Belgrade is that Milosevic knows Kosovo is lost, and is just looking for an excuse to let NATO troops occupy the province that will not destroy his standing among Serbian nationalists. Defiance of NATO, followed by submission in the face of overwhelming force after a day or two of bombing, would cement his standing among ultra-nationalists for years to come.

This analysis is true as far as it goes. Milosevic is not personally a nationalist (though he exploits the Serbians' paranoid brand of nationalism to stay in power), and he really doesn't give a damn what happens to Kosovo so long as he remains in power. He doesn't care if Serbs die under NATO's bombs, either. (The more the better, from his point of view.) But the Belgrade street underestimates how much this man can achieve by sheer tactics.

Suppose that NATO does drop a few bombs on Serbia. Okay, that helps the bitter pill go down. Then NATO troops move into Kosovo to enforce — what? An agreement, extorted from the two sides at Rambouillet, that there will be "substantial autonomy" for Kosovo including a largely Albanian police force, that most of the Serbian police and army troops will be withdrawn, and that after three years the status of Kosovo will be reconsidered.

An unscrupulous lawyer could do a lot with that. Now think what an unscrupulous national leader (who doesn't mind killing people, individually or in large numbers) could do to manipulate NATO into a confrontation with the KLA and start the flow of body bags back to the voters at home.

In the old Yugoslavia, Kosovo was just as much a self-governing territory as Bosnia or Croatia or Serbia itself. It really had just as much right to independence when the old federation collapsed. But for political and historical reasons, Kosovo was formally classed as an 'autonomous province' of Serbia, and Western countries have foolishly accepted this as meaning it is not entitled to independence.

So the Contact Group is all too likely to find, after six months or a year, that its refusal to recognise Kosovo's right to self-determination drives some of the KLA to start shooting at NATO troops there. In which case NATO will face two choices: to become Milosevic's unpaid agents in repressing Kosovo's fight for independence, or to go home. Either would suit Milosevic just fine.

It would be nice to think that the Western planners who are now backing into a troop commitment to Kosovo not only understand all this, but have a strategy to deal with it. Some of them do understand it, but I see no signs of a strategy — and on tactics, Milosevic will beat them every time.

The writer is an independent London-based journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries.

The Tartan post-nationalists

By Gwynne Dyer

"I'VE ALWAYS wanted to call it the Scottish Independence Party," says Alex Salmond, head of the Scottish National Party, who could be leading Scotland out of the United Kingdom in only a year or so if the SNP wins next May's election to the new Scottish parliament. "I'm a post-nationalist."

The notion of a 'post-nationalist' who leads an independence movement is charming, and it reveals a rather more European sensibility than prevails down south in England (where nationalism is so deep and confident that it's practically unconscious). But Salmond's professed distaste for the old-time religion still rings a bit false, because the psychology and mythology of Scotland's independence movement fit the paradigm of a First-World ethnic minority separatism perfectly.

The political arguments may seem to be about taxes and rights and constitutional issues, but it's really a psychodrama about self-esteem. The historical inferiority complex that drives Scottish nationalism is much more nuanced than that of the Flemish in Belgium or the Quebecois in Canada, but it's still there, together with the resulting chip on the shoulder. As Salmond observes, "when it rains in Scotland, some people blame the English."

So is the secret self-loathing that invariably accompanies a mythology of national oppression. I was going to illustrate this with extensive quotations from Irvine Welsh's 1992 novel 'Trainspotting,' a saga of the Scottish under-class's lost 'chemical generation' that has, weirdly, become a major cultural point of reference for Scotland's middle-class 'soft nationalists.' But this is a family newspaper.

Scotland's drawing rooms are full of intellectuals with unmarked veins who can recite verbatim the lengthy and spectacularly foul-mouthed anti-English rant that Welsh puts into the mouth of his junkie hero Renton. (Andrew Neil, editor of 'The Scotsman,' recently referred to it sarcastically as 'Scotland's Gettysburg Address'). But I'm thinking more of Renton's equally scatological rant against the Scots themselves — who are so pathetic, he complains, that they can't even get their own subjugation right: "We have to be colonised by a race of wankers."

But this is, as I said, a family newspaper, so there'll be no more quotes from 'Trainspotting' here. Instead, let me offer in evidence Don Paterson, poet, jazz musician, and recently the creator of the Radio 4 comedy series 'Kailyard Blues.' For he really is a post-modern nationalist.

"It was Billy Connolly, I think, who made the observation that Scotland was the only country in the world where we give the kitsch junk churned out for the tourist market to each other as Christmas presents — tartan punnets of Edinburgh rock, tea towels of Skye, wee figurines of Rob Roy, and, one is forced to add these days, Billy Connolly albums..."

"But back to those tea towels. The kitsch iconography... depends on the existence of a kind of virtual Scotland — a phenomenon nowhere near as depressing as some would make out.

A virtual nation comes into being when a nation persists but is never ratified, and is a means of cryogenically preserving the dream of that nationhood until such point as the science exists to revive it. Now we have the technology: Blair's Labour, in allowing the Scottish Assembly to become a reality, has (given us) the machine where before there was only the plug."

Paterson is quite right: 'Blair's machine,' the new Scottish parliament, is indeed the vehicle that could convey Scotland to an independence quite unforeseen even ten years ago.

For most of the past year, the SNP has been running neck-and-neck with Labour in the Scottish opinion polls. (The Conservatives, like the Liberal-Democrats, are only a minor party in Scotland). If the SNP emerges from the May election as the largest party in the Scottish Assembly, it is likely to form a government in coalition with the Liberal-Democrats and hold a referendum on independence within the next four years.

If it should actually win over half the seats — unlikely, given the element of proportional representation in the new Scottish voting system, but not impossible — then the SNP is committed to entering negotiations with London at once for the break-up of the United Kingdom. And Blair, the man who created the assembly, could hardly say no. So why did he do it?

Tony Blair is confident of his supreme skills as a political manipulator, and his hemi-semi-demi-Scotch background led him to imagine that he understood the place. He had not only patriotic but partisan reasons for wanting to keep Britain together, since Labour would rarely have formed a government in post-war Britain without its Scottish 'vote-bank.' So he created the Scottish Assembly in the belief that a strategically timed constitutional concession could kill off the separatist idea.

It was yet another vivid demonstration of the truth of the old constitutional adage: "If it ain't disastrously broke, don't try to fix it." Blair forgot that Scotland's constitutional complaints were only a rationalised facade for much deeper and more emotional agendas. Satisfy one set of demands, and the separatists will just move on to the next, because that's not what it's really about.

He should have known better. Don Paterson knows better.

"It's about pride; pride that you simply exist. Anyway, what's more important is that a nation convinces itself of the fact of its renaissance — it might be all a con trick, but in the past we've conned ourselves into servility too...

"It's perfectly possible to free ourselves from the twin vices of irony and kitsch. Take the kilt, for example; in its pure form, a supremely practical and comfortable piece of gear. For a few weeks after Scotland's first-round departure from the World or European Cups, the kilt, without dagger and sporran and hairy green socks, worn instead with dirty hi-tech squash shoes and a Marillion T-shirt, was quite a common sight on Scottish high streets. Slowly, within a week or two, the embarrassment of wearing women's clothing in public reasserted itself, and the kilt went back to something worn with Laurel and Hardy boxer shorts at weddings, or by wee plastic girl pipers wrapped in yellow cellophane.

"I, for one, would be happy to see a lot more kilt-wearing on a casual basis. If you go first."

Scotland has had a long and complex relationship with its far larger English neighbour, but on the whole it has been mutually beneficial. The Act of Union which united the English and Scottish parliaments in 1707 was a rational Scottish strategy for dealing with a European environment where smaller political units were at a growing disadvantage in the race for colonies, wealth, and power — and it was brilliantly successful.

The immediate result was the 18th-century blaze of the Scottish Enlightenment, and what one historian has called 'quasi- republican status' for Scotland in the newly named Great Britain. (The term 'British' was resurrected from the Latin to describe this new political entity, and the original intention was to rename Scotland and England 'North Britain' and 'South Britain').

As more and more of the world map turned pink during the 19th century, Scottish membership on the board of directors of The Greatest Empire The World Has Ever Seen translated directly into an astonishing expansion of Scotland's commerce and industry. Scots effectively RAN the British empire, providing a vastly disproportionate share of its military and colonial officers, its industrialists and engineers, and even its financiers and politicians. At the beginning of this century, Scotland was probably per capita the richest country in the world — and there was no talk of separatism at all.

Now the empire is gone, and with it the more obvious advantages of being 'British.' So the idea of reclaiming Scotland's independence was bound to come up, and it duly did. If the Norwegians can be independent, why not the Scots?

But it was never a passionate mass movement. "When I was younger the SNP had only 7 per cent of the vote and were generally seen as nutters and extremists. We used to call them the Scottish Nose-Pickers," recalls Stephen Noon, now Alex Salmond's personal assistant. And in 1977, the first time the Scots were asked if they wanted their own parliament back, not enough of them bothered to vote in the referendum to make the result valid.

Since then, the regional environment in Europe has grown steadily more congenial for small nation-states: the Soviet threat has vanished, and the European Union becomes a more plausible alternative to the British union with every passing day. So some improvement in the SNP's fortunes was bound to occur — but nothing like the gift that Tony Blair gave it.

Blair's problem was that Labour's Scottish vote-bank was eroding precisely because its seats there had been safe for so long: the Scottish Labour nomenclature was so corrupt, arrogant, and lazy that the voters were defecting to the SNP in protest. The Scottish Assembly was a Blair initiative intended to recapture the high ground for Labour in Scotland and kill the appeal of the nationalists, and Labour campaigned hardest of all for a 'yes' in the 1997 referendum on a revived parliament at Holyrood.

The Scots voted 'yes' — and then, contrary to all Blair's calculations, promptly began to move strongly into the SNP camp. Offer people an easy, emotionally appealing, and apparently cost-free option to run their affairs with no need to consult outsiders, and they're likely to take you up on it.

Suddenly the SNP found itself leading the polls for the first time in its history, and though Labour drew even in December, the Nats are not looking the least bit downcast. If not now, then later: in September, 50 per cent of Scots said they would vote for independence in a referendum — and fully two-thirds believed that independence will come. "When something becomes the currency of inevitability," says Salmond, "you're well on the way."

So how could Scottish independence actually come to pass, and what difference would it make?

The 'how' is almost childishly simple, since the United Kingdom has no written constitution. While the Scottish Assembly will not have control of defence, foreign affairs, or macro-economic policy, it will have the democratic legitimacy to deal with the Westminster parliament as an equal on Scottish affairs, which is a great deal more important. All that is needed to turn Scotland loose is to repeal the 1707 Act of Union: if the Holyrood parliament demands it, Westminster will have to comply.

What difference would an independent Scotland make? Not much, really. It currently gets a bigger share of central government spending than is strictly justified by its population: 8.7 per cent of the U.K.'s population, about 10.1 percent of public spending. But that post-independence shortfall would be largely filled if Edinburgh were to keep all the revenues from Britain's North Sea oil patch for itself.

Scotland's money would presumably be the euro (though it would want to join at a lower rate than the current bloated value of the pound). In today's globalised markets, the economies of scale that once persuaded Scots to join up with the English no longer operate strongly against a industrialised nation of 5 million people. And there would be savings, too: no security services, promises Alex Salmond, and no tanks or nukes either. Scotland would just make its legendary infantry regiments available for NATO and for peacekeeping duties.

And the benefits for Scotland? Well, lots of Scots would feel better about themselves, or think they would. And though there is definitely an ugly, anti-English side to Scottish nationalism now, with English schoolkids in Scotland being beaten up for being English, that would all fade away with independence, we are assured.

Just look how well Scottish football fans behaved (compared to the thuggish English) when they were in France for the World Cup last year, points out Don Paterson.

"The...Scots' entirely conscious taste for self-parody is...at last — through the benign insanity of the Tartan Army — receiving the international recognition it deserves. Some morons have opined that the Scots' disinclination to get involved in a street-fight is a reflection of the nation's lack of self-belief. But, from the terrible Russ Abbot 'Jimmy' hats to the chants of 'We are shite and we don't care,' this celebration of our deep international insignificance has been enormously heart-warming, especially to those of us who don't happen to believe that nationalism and jingoism go hand in hand."

It's a sweet idea, if not wholly convincing: a post-independence Glasgow where nobody beats you up in the pubs on Saturday night because independence has mellowed them out. And we are quite likely to find out how much of Paterson's vision comes true, because the odds are now in favour of an independent Scotland. 'Blair's machine' gives the SNP another kick at the can every four years, and eventually it's bound to win a majority.

Blair didn't have to create the Scottish Assembly, but it's too late now to undo it. Nor will the English fight Scottish independence all that hard, when the Scots finally get round to demanding it. If one-twelfth of the British population, stuck off at the northern end of the island, wants to leave, it will not injure either England's economy or its national identity.

Other large European Union countries will not be pleased, as they contemplate a precedent that could encourage the splintering away of Catalonia, Brittany, perhaps even Lombardy or Bavaria. But there is little they can do about it if the English themselves don't care.

Independence for Scotland is a fashion option, a lifestyle choice that has little prospect of hurting anybody very badly. It might even make some people happy. So it will probably happen.

LETTERS

Prayers for His Majesty King Hussein

To the Editor

MY DEEPEST prayers are with the people of Jordan in their sorrow. I share the grief of the Jordanian people for their gravely ill King, one of the finest humans to have lived during my lifetime. He is, to me, a person of peace. I have always admired him and followed his struggles as he tried to bring peace to this world. Love is all there is and we are all brothers and sisters. Tears of sadness roll down my cheeks, for a man I never met, yet felt I knew simply because we are all humans, subject to the same trials no matter where we live on this earth. His Majesty King Hussein knew this and tried throughout his life to make a difference in the world. I think he has. May peace be with you all, and know that you do not grieve alone; the world grieves with you.

Laura Lasala
Branford, CT
U.S.

To the Editor:

KING HUSSEIN is not just a great King for Jordan but for the whole world. His wise counsels and his quest for peace, his courage and his wisdom have been an inspiration for the whole world for many decades. Our tears mix with yours at this moment of grief proving again that we are one family.

Our Prayers and our Love are with him, his family, all the people of Jordan and all of his friends in the world. Long live the King.

John Bower
U.K.

To the Editor:

MY WIFE and I would like to express our deep concern over the acute condition of His Majesty King Hussein.

His Majesty has long been an ally and friend of the United Kingdom and has held an important role in Middle East politics.

He has offered a unique and indeed "common sense" approach to politics while still being there for his people.

My wife and I travel extensively to the Middle East and know that the Arab Nation would miss him severely.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to Queen Noor and his family and not least to the people of Jordan.

Paul and Ann Beardmore
6 Deepdale Rd
Belper
Derbyshire
DE56 1HQ
England
Paulann@mcmail.com

To the Editor:

I AM an ordinary person living in the United States. I know that our peoples have not always agreed, but you are a strong and good people, and God has blessed you with a great King.

As I write King Hussein is gravely ill. He has been one of the greatest people living on earth. A good man, a man of God; he has earned the respect of people all over the world.

In your time of grief, my family and I send you our heartfelt prayers.

Falko Schilling
Box 727
Saxtons River, VT 05154
U.S.

To the Editor:

I AM writing from Canada, and I just wanted to express the sympathy that many, many Canadians are feeling for your King and country.

Unfortunately, the Western media has traditionally presented an unfair image of the Middle East, centring on the extremism that can be found in any country, including our own.

King Hussein changed that image. To a great many Westerners, he is a symbol of decency and humility — things that had sadly not often been associated with the Middle East. King Hussein is a symbol of new hope.

I am 27, and like many people my age, I will always remember King Hussein as the first leader to put a kind, human face on the Arab world.

From our vantage point, he is a symbol of diplomacy — which is perhaps why Canadians connected with him (we have always been a nation of diplomats).

If only there could be more world leaders like King Hussein. God bless him.

Chris Rolfe
Toronto
Canada

To the Editor:

IF EVER miracles could occur, this would be the time.

King Hussein has always stood as a symbol of grace in leadership, not just among his own people, but worldwide as well. I send my heartfelt sympathies to Queen Noor and to the rest of the King's family, as well as the people of Jordan.

Pamela Sears
1760 Riverside Drive
Laramie, Wyoming
U.S.

To the Editor:

I WISH to send our prayers and deepest heartfelt support to the King and Queen and children and family and people of Jordan. We are with you during these times of sorrow. May God strengthen you all.

The Gossetts
U.S.

To the Editor:

I SHARE your grief as we all wait for news of your King, who has meant so much to his country and his region, and to peace in our lifetimes. His Majesty King Hussein has always been an example of how a monarch can lead in an era of democracy. I hope you realise that the entire world shares your immediate sadness.

Dave McLallen
mclallen@pell.net
U.S.

To the Editor:

I WANT to offer my sincere sympathy and prayers for the King. Few heroes have accomplished as much as this man has. I pray he lives a long, long time.

Deepest sympathy to his family and to his country, as he fights this illness.

Darlene Martin
Marysville
Washington
U.S.

To the Editor:

I AM Colombian by birth but global by heart. King Hussein was, is and always will be an inspiration to me to propagate peace and social justice.

Jordan is a very lucky country to have had as its leader such a just, honourable, humble and sincere man as His Majesty King Hussein. Hopefully his actions and deeds will never be forgotten by the generations to come; not only in your beloved Jordan but around the world. May God bless His Majesty King Hussein and you country Jordan.

J. Aragon
Colombia

To the Editor:

I AM just an ordinary middle class American now living in the Washington DC area. I am one of 16 children of Irish- and Italian American parents. I am very proud of my parents, and I love them dearly. They worked hard over the last fifty years raising us and giving us everything they had.

For many years I had little knowledge or understanding of the Middle East or Arabs. My knowledge was limited to the much publicised Jewish point of view and what appeared in the U.S. press which was usually about acts of terrorism.

The exception was your King. I first heard about him through the aviation press. I am a pilot and was intrigued by the King who was interested in aviation. Not only was he interested, he was a very accomplished pilot. I was very impressed that someone with so many responsibilities and duties was able to maintain his currency as a pilot. That of course was many years ago. In the past ten years your King's tireless work to find peace in the Middle East have been well reported in the American press. They have given me a new appreciation for your King and for the complexity of Jordan and the Middle East.

Because of this, I was very distressed to hear of you King's illness. I admire and respect the King for his tireless work toward world peace. But I feel a kinship because he is a pilot and knows the feeling of freedom and wonder of flying that only a pilot knows. At the memorial service for the U.S. astronauts killed in the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster, our President Reagan quoted a poem that was written by an aviator in World War II. The final verse describes how, at the end, the pilot will reach out and touch the face of God.

I am a lucky man. I have a wonderful family and live in a great country. The people of Jordan are equally blessed to have such a great leader.

Charles Petrone
U.S.

To the Editor:

I AM saddened by this very tough time for Jordan. My family and I pray for the King, His Family, and your country. May Peace be yours at this very sad time.

Remember, what the caterpillar calls the end of this world, The Master calls a butterfly.

Anthony Perrelli and family
U.S.

To the Editor:

MY DEEPEST sympathy and prayers go out to the family of King Hussein and the people of Jordan at such a difficult time.

The hearts of people worldwide are with you.

Regards,
Alexander Krivenyshev,
oceanographer
born in Siberia, Russia now in New York
U.S.

To the Editor:

LIKE SO many other Americans, I too want to express to the Royal Family and the people of Jordan my profound grief at the state of health of His Majesty King Hussein. He is rightly one of the most admired men in the world, by people of every political and religious persuasion. I had the great pleasure to visit Jordan a couple of years ago, and found your country and your people most warm and welcoming. May you all be comforted by the thoughts and prayers of well-wishers around the world, and may your country continue to prosper and be a force for peace in the years to come.

Marjorie Fitzpatrick
Carlisle, Pennsylvania
U.S.

To the Editor

PLEASE ACCEPT my sincere concern for King Hussein and his family and for all the people of Jordan. King Hussein has been a beacon of reasonableness in a sea of storm. I have admired him for many years and have often marvelled at his ability to form alliances to allow Jordan not only to survive but to thrive.

Mel Gregory
U.S.

To the Editor:

MY SYMPATHIES go out to the people of Jordan on the sad illness of their King. The world may be losing a great soul.

Diane Lindley
Santa Monica, California
U.S.

To the Editor:

ON BEHALF of my family, I would like you to know that our thoughts and prayers are with you and all Jordanians. We pray for your King.

The Barnperrys
U.S.

To the Editor:

I AND my entire family watch with deep sadness the grave illness suffered by His Majesty King Hussein.

For many years, even when Israel and Jordan were enemies, he was a light of hope in our region trying to make all realise that the only way to peace was, is and always will be through dialogue, not war.

When Prime Minister Rabin opened up the peace dialogue along with His Majesty, we knew that peace was in sight. We realise that it may take time — but due to the efforts of many, and in particular, His Majesty, it is inevitable.

During this period, our young daughter, Adi, who was then about 3 years old, fell in love with the King's pictures.

Every time he appeared on television or on a photograph in a newspaper, she would see the image and give His Majesty a kiss. At the time, we meant to send His Majesty a letter and tell him of this and also of our support for him. But as so often happens, we did not. Today I deeply regret not having done so.

Our daughter is deeply affected by the news of the King's declining health as are we all. Our thoughts, our prayers and our hopes go out to His Majesty, the Queen, Crown Prince Abdullah, all of His Majesty's children and family and to the entire Jordanian people.

We hope and pray with all of our hearts and souls that God will provide us with a miracle.

Philip and Tsvia Barnea, Tanya Barnea, Asaf Barnea, Yanay Barnea and Adi Barnea.
Kibbutz Beit Haemek
Israel

To the Editor:

A NOTE from America to say that our hearts and prayers go out to all the people of Jordan, and the entire Middle East over the seriousness of His Majesty's condition. Few men or women in my lifetime have given more, or had a more profound affect on the world. His commitment to peace, and to the people of his country, has not been lost on the people in this country.

Michael Davis
Seattle, Washington
U.S.

To the Editor:

WITH THE rest of the world I wish to express my deep sympathy for your country in this most difficult time. I was with a group of American tourists who visited Jordan just two weeks ago.

We were in Amman the day King Hussein returned and witnessed the great joy and celebration. We were also in Amman on the day that he announced his successor and returned to the United States. We saw first hand the great love and respect of the Jordanian people for their King. Our prayers are with you in this time of sadness.

Tina Whitehead
Uniontown, Pennsylvania
U.S.

To the Editor:

WE HAVE spent the most wonderful time of our lives in your beloved country, and we mourn with you today. Allah'u Akbar.

Paul Schulze-Kieslich and Family
Germany

To the Editor:

AS AN American I have followed the life and accomplishments of King Hussein for many years. What a great man — a giant on the world stage. His contributions to peace and progress for the Middle East have provided an example for leaders everywhere. To the people of Jordan, please accept the heartfelt affection and comfort from the people of America. Oh, that we had more leaders with the moral strength, courage, and spiritual insight of King Hussein.

Robin Widgery
Grand Blanc, Michigan
U.S.

To the Editor:

I WOULD like to add my own modest hopes and best wishes, to those of countless others, for the complete and swift recovery of His Majesty King Hussein.

I have always held him in great respect for his relentless pursuit of peace. I wish all strength to His Majesty, the Royal family and the people of Jordan in this difficult time.

Andrew Henry Cornell Schuh-Rutten
Thornhill, Ontario
Canada.

Lebanon looks for foreign investment

BEIRUT (Agencies) — Lebanese Prime Minister Salim Hoss has announced plans for a range of measures to attract foreign investment to the country, painting a glowing picture of its existing advantages.

"The liberal economic system, banking secrecy, relatively low taxation, free currency exchange and circulation, the presence of qualified personnel and the existence of a legal infrastructure all mean that Beirut can be a regional investment centre," said Hoss, at the opening here of a forum on industrial investment.

"Lebanon's role is to complement, not rival its Arab neighbours and brothers, but it has the capacity to adapt to change and to market needs," he said, pointing out that its wealth of universities and institutes made it an ideal site for the establishment of new industries.

He said his government intended to simplify and modernise its investment procedures, set up free economic zones and reach agreements to avoid double taxation.

On the same theme, Economy Minister Nasser Saidi said the government hopes to pass a law protecting intellectual and industrial property by June.

It also intends to make Lebanon more attractive by reducing the budget deficit and public debt, reforming the administration and privatising utilities, he said.

The head of the state Institute for Developing Investment in Lebanon, Yussef Shukair, told AFP that the forum wanted to attract foreign investors willing to establish enterprises in the food industry or construction, either as joint ventures, or alone.

Participants in the forum have come from China, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and the United States.

Meanwhile, Youssef Choucair, chairman of the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL), said a healthy industry meant more income for the government, which is also burdened by a budget deficit expected to exceed 40 per cent of 1999 spending.

"Lebanon is determined to attract more investments to its industrial sector and increase the volume of its exports," he told a forum organised by the U.N. Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) conference aimed at promoting industrial projects worth $71 million.

"Increasing exports will contribute to supplying the treasury with revenues needed to cut down the trade deficit," Choucair said.

Lebanon's trade deficit narrowed to $6.3 billion in 1998 from $6.8 million a year earlier. Industrial goods made up 85 per cent of exports, which stood at $716 million. Imports totalled $7.06 billion.

The government sees industry as key to economic development and is seeking to boost industrial investment to more than 30 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) from 25 per cent currently.

Saidi told Reuters recently the state was considering cutting custom duties on imported raw materials to encourage manufacturing.

Choucair said IDAL was promoting tax-free zones to lure manufacturers and their cash to Lebanon, located near Middle Eastern, European and Asian markets.

Lebanon has two free zones in the port cities of Beirut and Tripoli and is planning to set up several more within the next two years, Choucair said.

Projects in the pipeline include a 1.67 million metre square industrial park south of Beirut and a free zone with its own airport and seaport in northern Lebanon.

IDAL said 1998 was one of the best years for industrial investment in Lebanon, when capital inflows to the sector reached $200 million.

Choucair said export-oriented industries that would benefit Lebanon included food, clothing, construction materials and software development.

"We should focus on industries where value is added through product design and marketing and require a fast response to changing market conditions," he added.

In another development, a senior London-based investment banker gave a strong vote of confidence to the new Lebanese government's pledge to reform and privatise.

"This president and cabinet seem firmly committed to privatisation, debt reduction and fiscal improvement," said Paul Raphael, head of emerging markets at Merrill Lynch.

His firm has marketed around half of Lebanon's $2.5 billion in outstanding foreign bonds, mostly to Lebanese banks and expatriates at highly competitive yields.

Lebanon last defied sceptical markets in October by successfully issuing a $450 million seven-year bond carrying a yield of 8.75 per cent

A reform-minded government which took office in December aims to reduce the country's $18 billion debt and cut the budget deficit from around 14 per cent of gross domestic product in 1998 to 5-6 per cent within three years.

However it has yet to detail its reform plans, including a privatisation programme and methods to raise revenue.

"The government realises that privatisation is a necessary tool of fiscal consolidation. There have been few pronouncements because officals want to secure the necessary laws first and follow due process, and rightly so," said Raphael, who was involved in privatising Mexican telecommunications in 1991.

The Mexican sell-off initially involved France Telecom, Southwest Bell and Lebanese billionnaire Carlos Selim.

The consortium bought 20 per cent and a management control contract, helping to increase the value of the company from $4 billion to $30 billion, said Raphael.

He envisaged Lebanon's state-dominated the telecom sector, estimated to be worth between $2-6 billion undergoing a similar process. The state has 52 public enterprises that include all utilities, the national airline and a tobacco manufacturing and importing monopoly.

"The government realises it has to privatise large and marketable enterprises to have an impact on the debt stock," said Raphael.

Uncertainty about public commitment to debt reduction has caused investments to dry up and reduced foreign reserves, say some local bankers.

However Raphael, a Lebanese who met with President Emile Lahoud and his economic team, expected the government to renew financial confidence by announcing a detailed 1998 budget this month.

"The pressures the pound is under are so mild in the global context. The Lebanese miracle of preserving a managed exchange rate when other currencies such as the rouble and real have tumbled is set to continue," he said.

The Lebanese pound appreciated an average of three per cent in the six years of the previous governments headed by Rafik Hariri. However, from 1992-1998 the national debt rose from around $2.7 billion to $18 billion — the highest in emerging markets on a per capita basis.

Exchange Rates

Saturday, 06-02-99

ACCESS 4646868

CURRENCY	JORDAN DINAR	SAUDI RIYAL	U.A.E DIRHAM	BAHRAIN DINAR	OMAN RIYAL	QATAR RIYAL	KUWAIT DINAR	EGYPT POUND	US DOLLAR
JORDAN DINAR	1 0000	0 1887	0 1927	1 8778	1 8389	0 1944	2 3362	0 2078	0 7080
SAUDI RIYAL	5.2980	1.0000	1 0210	9.9485	9 7426	1 0301	12.3877	1 1011	3 7510
U.A.E DIRHAM	5 1893	0 9795	1.0000	9.7443	9 5426	1 0089	12 1334	1 0785	3 6740
BAHRAIN DINAR	0 5325	0 1005	0.1026	1 0000	0 9793	0 1035	1 2452	0 1107	0 3770
OMAN RIYAL	0.5438	0.1026	0 1048	1 0211	1.0000	0 1057	1 2715	0 1130	0.3850
QATAR RIYAL	5.1434	0 9708	0.9912	9.6581	9 4562	1 0000	12 0261	1 0690	3 6415
KUWAIT DINAR	0.4277	0.0807	0.0824	0 8031	0 7865	0 0832	1 0000	0.0889	0 3028
EGYPT POUND	4 8114	0 9082	0 9272	9 0348	8.8478	0 9356	11 2500	1 0000	3.4065
LEBANON LIRA	21 4831	4.0549	4 1399	40 3405	39 5055	4.1789	50 2312	4 4650	15 2100
US DOLLAR	1 4124	0.2666	0 2722	2.6522	2.5973	0 2746	3 3025	0 2936	1 0000
G.BRITAIN STERLIN	0 8650	0.1633	0.1667	1 6243	1 5906	0.1682	2 0226	0 1798	0 6124
GERMANY MARK	2.4536	0.4631	0.4728	4.6073	4 5119	0 4770	5 7369	0 5099	1 7371
SWITZERLAND FRA	2.0071	0 3788	0 3868	3 7688	3 6908	0 3902	4 6929	0 4171	1 4210
FRANCE FRANC	8.2289	1.5532	1 5858	15.4521	15 1323	1.5999	19 2406	1 7103	5 8261
JAPAN YEN *	1 5986	0 3017	0 3081	3 0018	2.9397	0 3108	3.7378	0 3322	1 1318
HOLLAND GULDER	2.7645	0 5218	0 5327	5 1912	5 0837	0 5375	6 4640	0 5746	1 9573
SWEDEN KRONA	11.1342	2.1016	2.1456	20.9076	20 4748	2 1648	26 0337	2.3141	7 8830
ITALY LIRA**	24 2903	4 5848	4 6809	45.6130	44 6678	4 7227	56.7950	5 0485	17 1975
BELGIUM FRANC	50.6060	9 5519	9.7520	95 0271	93 0600	9 8391	118 3257	10 5179	35 8290
AUSTRALIA DOLLA	2.1690	0.4094	0 4180	4 0728	3 9885	0.4217	5 0714	0 4508	1 5356
GREEC DRACHM	4.0370	0 7620	0.7780	7 5808	7 4237	0 7849	9 4392	0 8390	2 8582
CYPRUS POUND	1 3774	0 5172	0 5280	5 1453	5.0388	0 5327	6 4069	0 5695	1 9400
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	17 2621	3 2582	3 3265	32.4146	31 7436	3 3562	40 3620	3 5877	12 2216
CANADA DOLLAR	2 1059	0 3975	0 4058	3.9545	3 8726	0 4094	4 9240	0 4377	1 4910
EURO	1 2545	0 2368	0 2417	2 3567	2.3069	0 2439	2 9332	0 2607	0 8882

CURRENCY	US DOLLAR	G.BRITAIN STERLING	GERMANY MARK*	SWITZERLAND FRANC	FRANCE FRANC	JAPAN YEN *	HOLLAND GULDER	ITALY LIRA*	EURO
US DOLLAR	1 0000	1 6329	0 5757	0 7037	0 1716	0 8835	0 5109	5 8148	1 1259
G.BRITAIN STERLIN	0 6124	1 0000	0 3525	0 4310	0 1051	0 5411	0 3129	3 5610	0 6895
GERMANY MARK	1 7371	2.8368	1 0000	1 2225	0.2982	1 5348	0 8875	10 1010	1 9558
SWITZERLAND FRA	1.4210	2.3204	0 8180	1 0000	0 2439	1 2555	0 7260	8 2628	1 5999
FRANCE FRANC	5.8261	9.5134	3 3539	4 1000	1 0000	5 1476	2.9766	33 8774	6 5596
JAPAN YEN*	113.1800	184 8116	65.1536	79 6481	19 4265	1 0000	57 8249	658 1177	127 4294
HOLLAND GULDER	1.9573	3 1961	1.1267	1 3774	0 3360	1 7294	1 0000	11 3812	2 2037
SWEDEN KRONA	7.8830	12.8722	4 5380	5 5475	1 3531	6 9650	4 0275	45 8380	8 8755
ITALY LIRA**	17 1975	28 0618	9.9000	12.1024	2.9518	15 1948	8 7864	1 0000	19 3627
BELGIUM FRANC	35 8290	58 5052	20.6255	25 2140	6 1498	31 6567	18 3054	208 3382	40 3399
AUSTRALIA DOLLA	1 5356	2.5075	0 8840	1 0807	0.2636	1 3568	0 7846	8 9293	1 7290
GREEC DRACHMA	2.8582	4.6672	1 6454	2 0114	0 4906	2.5254	1 4603	16 6198	3 2180
CYPRUS POUND	1.9400	3 1678	1 1168	1 3652	0 3330	1 7141	0 9912	11 2807	2 1842
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	12.2216	19 9567	7 0355	8 6007	2.0977	10 7984	6 2442	71 0660	13 7603
CANDA DOLLAR	1 4910	2 4347	0 8583	1.0493	0 2558	1 3174	0 7618	8 6698	1 6787
EURO	0 8882	1 4503	0 5113	0 6250	0 1524	0 7847	0 4538	5 1646	1 0000

MAJOR CURRENCIES AGAINST JORDAN DINAR

CENTRAL BANK BULLETIN

NOTE NEITHER ACCESS NOR THE PUBLISHER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY ERRORS OR MISTAKES

DEPOSIT INTEREST PRICES

CURRENCY	1 M	3 M	6 M	1 YEAR
US DOLLAR	4.5625	4 6200	4 6200	4 6300
G.BRITAIN STERLING	5.7500	5 5600	5 3800	5.2500
EURO	3.0400	3 0000	2.9300	2.9000
GERMANY MARK	0.0000	0 0000	0 0000	0 0000
SWITZERLAND FRANC	1.0700	1 1400	1 2000	1 3700
JAPAN YEN*	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0 0000

CBJA

CURRENCY	ASK	BID
US DOLLAR	0 7080	0 7100
G.BRITAIN STERLING	1 1549	1 1607
GERMANY MARK	0 4072	0 4092
SWITZERLAND FRANC	0 4981	0 5005
FRANCE FRANC	0 1214	0 1220
JAPAN YEN*	0 6252	0 6283
HOLLAND GULDER	0 3614	0 3632
ITALY LIRA*	0 0411	0 0413
EURO	0 7984	0 8004

WORLD STOCK MARKETS

STOCK MARKET	INDEX	CLOSING	LAST CLOSE	CHANGE
FRANKFURT	DAX	5060.77	5077 85	2.92
HONG KONG	HANG SENG	9190.20	9438 65	-248 45
LONDON	FT-SE 100	5855 30	5939.90	-84 60
NEW YORK	DJ INDUS.	9304.24	9304 50	-0.26
NEW YORK	NYSE COMPOSITE	567.28	281 06	296.22
NEW YORK	AMEX COMPOSITE	708.28	707 12	-0 86
NEW YORK	S+P 500	1238.40	1248 49	-9 09
TOKYO	NIKKEI -225	13898 08	14086 85	-188 77
PARIS	CAC 40	4147.30	4167.42	-20 12
FRANKFURT	COMMERZBANK	4661.26	4661.26	0 00

PRECIOUS METALS

METAL	ASK	BID
GOLD	288 50	289 00
SILVER	5.65	5 68
PLATINUM	359.50	361 50

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U.S. job growth robust as prosperity reins

WASHINGTON (R) — The rock-solid U.S. economy created jobs at a vigorous pace in January and the jobless rate held to its lowest level in a generation, as an eight-year era of prosperity showed no sign of fading.

The Labour Department said employers outside the farm sector hired a larger-than-expected 245,000 workers last month, following payroll growth of 298,000 in December.

The U.S. unemployment rate stayed steady at 4.3 per cent, hovering near a low not seen since 1970 — in the midst of the Vietnam war.

"This is the 19th month in a row that the U.S. unemployment rate has been below five per cent," said U.S. Labour Secretary Alexis Herman. She added that the share of all Americans who had jobs surged to a record high of 65 per cent, as the hiring boom attracted not only traditional job seekers but also home-makers, retirees and former welfare recipients.

U.S. economists in a Reuters survey had expected payrolls to rise just 135,000 and the unemployment rate to edge up to 4.4 per cent. The robust jobs report looked a bit more moderate in light of a sharp downward revision to December payroll jobs, which the department previously said increased by 378,000.

"I see this report as more evidence of ongoing strong growth in the U.S. economy," said Fred Breimyer, economist with State Street Bank and Trust Co. in Boston. "I would call it above-trend growth."

Month after month, private economists have been expecting the red-hot labour market to cool, betting that the economic woes afflicting Asia, Russia and Latin America would start to encroach on the United States.

But the rate of job creation has consistently outpaced forecasts, and January was no exception.

"The story is the same," said Robert Dederick, economic consultant at Northern Trust Co. in Chicago. "The labour market remains tight, demand for labour remains strong and the oasis of prosperity continues to flourish."

Services, such as management consulting, computer services and engineering, contributed to the upbeat jobs picture.

The manufacturing sector, one of the few areas of the economy to clearly show spillover from the global turmoil, shed jobs in January, as it has for much of the past year.

But the job losses of 13,000 last month and 16,000 in December were much smaller than those of last October and November, leading some economists to speculate that the worst may be over for the beleaguered factory sector.

The strong job market meant bigger paychecks for U.S. workers. Average hourly earnings of non-supervisory workers jumped six cents to $13.04 in January. Hourly earnings are up 4.0 per cent from a year ago, easily outpacing the inflation rate which is running at 1.6 per cent.

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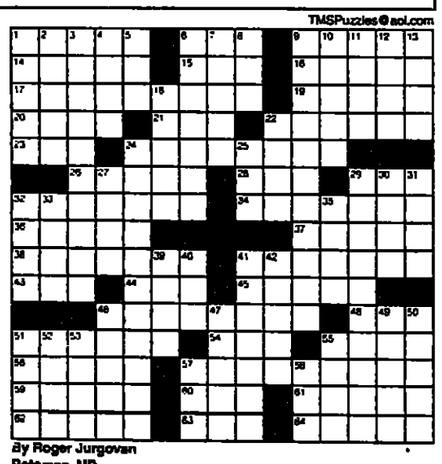
Samer Madanat

THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

TMSPuzzles@aol.com



ACROSS
1 Opening letters
6 Prevent
9 Oregon capital
14 More certain
15 Troy, NY school
16 One-for-one deal
17 Popular puzzle
19 Incandescent
20 City on the Irtysh River
21 High card
22 Toy-car sound effects
23 Sch. trainees
24 Superior examples
26 Exposed
28 Egt.-Syr., once
29 Numbers pro
32 Suggest
34 Knocked for a loop
36 Bowling alleys
37 French river
38 Supervise
41 Lends a hand
43 Affirmative
44 Sault __ Marie
45 Asian weights
46 Benchmark
48 Fidel's comrade
51 Open a flag
54 End of pay?
55 Caspian feeder
56 Twenty
57 German medal
59 Canine malady
60 Girl of the house
61 Brazilian palm
62 Military student
63 Mothers
64 Try some

DOWN
1 Flamboyant tie
2 Myanmar, previously
3 Poison symbol
4 Cubicle furniture
5 Hesitator's sounds
6 Fabric with a raised design
7 __-ski
8 Shed
9 Ill-fated
10 Rival of Sparta and Athens
11 "Symphonie Espagnole" composer
12 Dead Sea kingdom
13 Street of stables
18 Cardiff's country
22 Small bottle
24 Hollywood to Vine, e.g.
25 Word extension: abbr.
27 Impersonator
29 Move back and forth
30 Closely confined
31 Thirst quenchers
32 Stratagem
33 Praise highly
35 Trompe l'__ (photorealism)
39 & others
40 Post-dusk
41 Perplexed
42 Plastic-wrap brand
46 Sudden increase
47 S.S. Andrea __
49 Attacks
50 Borden's cow
51 Branch of the mil.
52 Inter-campus sports grp.
53 Affectionate
55 Bear constellation
57 Belief system: suff.
58 Persian or Siamese

By Roger Jurgovan
Potomac, MD

R	I	T	E		P	A	T	E	R		D	A	F	T
I	D	O	L		A	N	I	S	E		A	N	O	A
N	E	W	F	A	N	G	L	E	D		T	G	I	F
D	A	N		W	E	L	L		A	M	U	L	E	T
			H	A	L	O		S	C	A	R	E		
A	S	T	O	R	S		S	A	T	I	A	T	E	D
S	T	A	N	D		C	A	N	O	N		E	R	A
K	A	N	E		R	O	G	E	R		F	R	A	T
E	G	G		D	E	W	A	R		M	O	R	S	E
W	E	L	C	O	M	E	S		C	A	R	E	E	R
		E	L	G	A	R		S	A	L	E			
U	N	D	O	E	R		C	A	R	T		A	P	R
S	A	W	S		Q	U	A	D	R	A	N	G	L	E
E	P	E	E		U	N	T	I	E		O	R	A	N
D	E	B	T		E	A	S	E	L		M	A	Y	O

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Peanuts

Andy Capp

Mutt'n'Jeff

THE BETTER HALF®

By Glasbergen

"Why can't I put leftovers into my IRA? I'll need something to eat when I retire!"

JUMBLE®

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

GITHE

TRAFC

HILUME

GAIWHE

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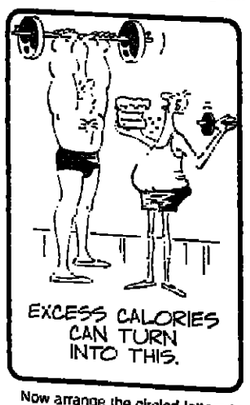

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Ans: A

Saturday's Jumbles: ADMIT MOUND INVEST ELICIT
Answer: Often heard by a phone solicitor in the middle of the message — THE DIAL TONE

(Answers tomorrow)

Daily Business Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Potash exports may rise to 750,000 tonnes during the first half of this year

** DURING A marketing tour of China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan, a three-member team representing the Arab Potash Company was able to sign a number of contracts that will raise potash exports during the first half of this year to 750,000 tonnes, 170,000 tonnes more than the volume exported during the same period of 1998.

Team leader Wanas Hindawi revealed that the company's exports last month were 155,000 tonnes for a net amount of $16 million. He described the January sales as a record noting that they were 83,000 tonnes higher than the volume exported during January 1998.

Hindawi said that under the agreements signed, China and Taiwan will be buying 210,000 tonnes of potash this year. The company, he added, will be supplying China with 150,000 tonnes during the first half of this year at a price higher than that charged during the second half of 1998.

Japan agreed to buy an extra 10,000 tonnes this year to bring its minimum annual purchases up to 50,000 tonnes. Hindawi said noting that the additional volume should be seen as an accomplishment as the overall consumption of potash in Japan is declining. "But due to the high quality of Jordanian potash and the strong ties with Japan, the team was able to reach an understanding with the Japanese to raise their purchases of potash," he added.

Hindawi who is deputy general manager and marketing manager of the Arab Potash Company said that despite the economic difficulties in South East Asia, the firm managed to maintain the same volume of exports to South Korea.

During the visit to Taiwan, the team signed a memorandum of understanding with the largest importing firm there to buy 60,000 tonnes of potash this year.

The volume is to be raised during the coming three years to cover 70 per cent as a minimum of its imports. At present, Taiwan buys 100,000 tonnes and the amount will be raised to reach 150,000 tonnes after three years (Al Ra'i).

Statistics detail type, number and volume of investments during last month

** ACCORDING TO the latest statistics issued by the Ministry of Industry and Trade, a total of 320 companies with a JD16.51 million in capital was registered last month. Commerce topped the list as 233 companies registered with a total capital of JD13.65 million. Industry came in second place as JD2.1 million were invested by 35 companies in this sector.

In the service and contracting sectors, the statistics showed 42 firms and 10 companies respectively investing JD365,000 and JD390,000.

The governorate of Amman took the largest share of the investments as 270 companies with JD15.84 million in investments were registered in the capital.

In addition, there was 848 investors who set up sole proprietorships last month. The capital invested by those individuals amounted to JD3.4 million of which JD0.9 million were put in the industrial sector by 69 investors.

Commerce topped the list also in this category as 557 sole proprietorships were set up with a total capital of JD1.7 million (Al Ra'i).

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) A friend could come up with a crazy scheme today. If so, beware. Sometimes his or her ideas are not all that practical, and this is likely to be one of them. Be nice about it, though. The germ of a workable idea may be hidden in there, so don't throw the whole thing out. Just proceed with caution.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You're the one who gets to say how things will be in your life, of course, but someone who's a little more demanding might appear to be calling the shots. This is where it gets tricky. If you're going to let someone else lead you, make sure it's in the right direction. That way, you're still the brains behind the operation.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) If you're going to travel today, be careful. You can expect some sort of difficulty. Hopefully, you won't have to change a flat tire or something like that. Make sure the car is full of gas. Don't try to skate on the edge this time. You don't have that much slack. Take all the precautions necessary to make your adventure a happy one.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) There will be some absolutely magnificent moments today, and several rather upsetting ones. The magnificent ones involve love, games and relationships with children. The upsetting ones involve money. Now that you're forewarned, you can take some precautions. Not a bad habit to get into anyway.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) You're likely to find something really neat for your home today. A forgotten treasure could be as near as your own basement. You'll also gather some rather interesting information in a private conversation. People who usually doesn't say much could get to talking, if you feed them a few provocative questions.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Work has been interfering with your plans all week. Today, you might be able to get around it for a little while and devote your attention to a person who loves you. He or she has been waiting patiently while you've been preoccupied. Devote this day to pampering yourself and the people you love best. That's an order.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) If you and your sweetheart work together today, you could save quite a bit of money. You have great creative talent, and it looks like the other person does, too. Why should you shell out good cash for somebody else's creation when you can do it just as well yourself, and maybe even better?

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) A gentle person could be rather irritating. You want things to get done quickly, and this person is lagging behind. If you simply take responsibility for your part of the project and do it well, the others will get the message. You're setting a good example for everyone, so go ahead and strut your stuff.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) If you feel there's something you're supposed do, but you don't quiet know how, take heart. Although this is uncomfortable, it could be just the impetus you need to tackle a tough assignment. Study may be required, but once you settle down, you should be able to focus your attention pretty well.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) A relationship that starts out casually could grow more intimate. Of course, you need to be with this person. That might take a little effort. Whenever conditions are good for romance, your participation is required. If you go where you're apt to meet the kind of person you'd like to hang out with, you could get very lucky.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 18) If there's someone in your life who likes to control you, you're liable to clash with that person today. Is it mom? Well, sometimes you just have to put up with it. Today, prove you really are an enlightened being. Make her feel like the Queen of Sheba and you'll both get to have a happy day instead of a miserable one.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) You're still out there breaking records left and right. You're awesome, you're amazing, you're stupendous, but you also ought to be a little careful. It's important to know when to put on the brakes. Today, you're going to need skill as well as enthusiasm to succeed. So don't overdo it.

Birthstone of February:
Amethyst — Onyx

Japan seen needing weaker yen at 140 to dollar

TOKYO (AFP) — Japan and the rest of Asia can break out of their economic crisis only if the yen falls to about 140 to the dollar, Deutsche Bank chief economist Norbert Walter said this week.

"Structural reforms are not enough. Japan's and Asia's troubles require a favourable environment that includes a yen that is weak for a number of years," Walter told an Institute for International Monetary Affairs symposium.

A good level for the dollar would be 140 yen and $1.20 to the euro, he told the Tokyo meeting, titled "Prescription for Recovery of the World Economy."

"The Asian crisis is far from over," said the Deutsche Bank chief economist. "Asia continues to be in recession and its most important economy, Japan, remains in deflation," he added.

"A weak yen will help this country to consolidate its bad loan problem within three to five years, Walters stressed."

Japanese vice finance minister for international affairs Eisuke Sakakibara, known as Mr. Yen for his sway over the foreign exchange markets, told the same symposium that a recovery was in sight for Japan this year.

"We are likely to bottom out in the middle of 1999 but after that we cannot expect very robust growth," Sakakibara said.

After two years in recession, the Japanese government has forecast economic growth of 0.5 per cent for the fiscal year starting on April 1, but the consensus among private economists is that Japan will not return to growth until 2000 at the earliest.

For Deutsche Bank's Walter, with 40 per cent of the planet in recession, the only engine ticking over well is the U.S. economy.

Much more optimistic than his counterpart John Lipsky from Chase Manhattan, Walter forecast the U.S. economy would grow at three per cent in 1999.

According to Lipsky, the key engine of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) growth, household consumption, will come back into line with income. "If so, GDP growth this year will diminish to a pace of about one per cent, down from about four per cent in 1998," he said.

That is not to say, he added, that the end is nigh for the "long boom" of the U.S. economy, which is finally harvesting the fruit of its anti-inflationary monetary policy and financial deregulation.

For Walter, the United States is benefitting because "they have done their homework."

"In Europe we are very happy, we have a good money, the euro," the economist added. "It is there despite all the ink that has been wasted in the pink press," he said, apparently referring to the Financial Times.

"Unfortunately, we don't have a good economic policy," Walter added, owing to the "social state heritage."

Left-oriented governments want to take more "of what has been proven not to be good advice," the economist said.

Germany and France would do better to follow the example of small European nations enjoying good growth such as Ireland, Finland or Portugal, he said, the latter being "run by a socialist government that have learned the lesson ... that the market has to be your friend rather than your enemy."

A.F.M TRADE Saturday,06-02-99
ACCESS 4646868

Company	Open Price	Close Price	Change
BANKS			
ARAB Bk	215.000	213.000	- 0.93%
NT'L Bk	1.510	1.490	- 1.32%
.Bk. OF JO	1.290	1.250	- 3.10%
THE HOUSING Bk	2.760	2.680	- 2.55%
JO. KUWAIT Bk	1.690	1.670	- 1.18%
JO. GULF Bk	0.680	0.670	- 1.47%
JO. ISLAMIC Bk	1.660	1.630	- 1.81%
UNION Bk	1.000	0.980	- 2.00%
PHILADELPHIA Bk	0.520	0.510	- 1.92%
BANKS INDEX	277.600	point =	-1.14%
INSURANCE			
ARAB INS	1.900	1.850	- 2.63%
INSURANCE INDEX	125.060	point =	-0.30%
SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.710	1.670	- 2.34%
VEHICLES OWNERS	2.690	2.560	- 4.83%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0.790	0.760	- 3.80%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1.150	1.130	- 1.74%
SERVICES INDEX	111.900	point =	-0.58%
INDUSTRY			
CEMENT	3.580	3.500	- 2.23%
PHOSPHATE	2.350	2.240	- 4.68%
ARAB POTASH	3.870	3.700	- 4.39%
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ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	3.150	3.000	- 4.76%
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JO. PIPES	1.130	1.100	- 2.65%
DAR AL DAWA	5.450	5.380	- 1.28%
MIDDEL EAST COMPLEX	0.540	0.530	- 1.85%
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EL- ZAY	1.290	1.260	- 2.33%
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(%EXPORT Bk (75	0.910	0.890	- 2.20%
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CENTRAL STORG	0.350	0.350	0.00%
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ARAB INT'L. TRADE	0.200	0.190	- 5.00%
SPECIALZED INVES	0.850	0.810	- 4.71%
NAMICO	0.240	0.230	- 4.17%
(%MIDDLE EAST PHAR(90	0.600	0.570	- 5.00%
UNITED ENG. IND	0.190	0.180	- 5.26%
INT'L CERAMIC	0.380	0.360	- 5.26%
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Egypt plans bonds worth 3 billion pounds this month

CAIRO (R) — Egypt will offer bonds worth three billion pounds ($880 million) in February as part of efforts to strengthen the bond market, the chairman of the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) has said.

"One of our main priorities as regulators this year is to activate the bond market, either the primary market or the secondary one," Abdul Hamid Ibrahim told Reuters by telephone.

"What's new about this issue is that it's large with a long maturity to establish a benchmark for private-sector firms should they wish to finance their activities through long-term bond issues," he said.

The Al Ahram newspaper quoted Ibrahim as saying the central bank would administer the 10-year bonds and the finance ministry would set the yield.

Mostafa Assal, head of fixed income at EFG-Hermes Securities Brokerage, said this was Egypt's first 10-year issue.

"It will lead to more transparency as it will give investors an idea where interest rates are heading in the long-term," he said.

He added the new issue would increase liquidity in the bond market, which he stressed needed more bonds and more traders.

Al Ahram quoted Ibrahim as saying that under new amendments to the capital markets law, companies wishing to issue bonds must obtain a credit rating of at least triple B minus.

Initially four companies — IBCA, Standard and Poors, Moody's and the local Nile Rating Company — would be authorised to issue ratings, the CMA said.

"This (rating system) is very positive. It gives confidence to the investor and credibility to the company and the market," said Nidal Assar, head of capital markets at Arab Bank, adding that issuers would be encouraged to offer realistic rates.

Bond trading on the Cairo bourse remains thin compared with that in equities, but Ibrahim said it was growing fast. "Trade in bonds does not exceed three per cent (of total transactions) till now due to limited bond issues," he added.

In the three years since Egypt launched its bond market, 27 corporate bonds worth around three billion pounds have been issued. "This is in addition to government bonds worth 8.5 billion pounds," Ibrahim said.

On Jan. 3, the first trading day of the year, the government offered seven-year treasury bonds worth 500 million pounds at a fixed rate of 10 per cent.

Ibrahim said the finance ministry had decided to issue bonds on a monthly basis to have various yields to maturity.

He said the CMA was preparing rules for bond market-makers as well as a special bond trading system, but gave no details.

This week, the CMA provisionally approved establishment of a brokerage that would deal only in bonds, Ibrahim said.

Oman banks see wider share trade limit aiding market

MUSCAT (R) — Bankers and investors in Oman have welcomed the introduction of an extended daily share trading limit on the country's bourse, saying the change would bring fairer values and smoother stock movements.

The Muscat Securities Market (MSM) last week raised its daily limit on share price rises and falls to 10 per cent from the previous five per cent limit.

"Five per cent was too narrow a trading limit really and people tended to either head for the top or bottom of that range straight away," a senior bank executive in Oman told Reuters.

"Ten per cent is an appreciable change and gives a more reasonable, fairer trading price for shares," he said, adding that before shares would often hit the so-called "limit-up" and "limit-down" levels very quickly.

Commerce and Industry Minister Makboul Ben Ali Ben Sultan was quoted last week as saying the decision to extend the limits was aimed at helping cope with the "current needs of the market and to promote the standard of MSM so that it could stand on an equal footing with major international capital markets."

Bankers in the Arab Gulf state said the new limits appeared to be working well so far.

Another executive at an Omani bank who declined to be named said share price movements were already noticeably smoother.

The first banker said the extended trading parameters would give a better reflection of broader market trends, as five per cent limits had meant the time scale of any large falls or rises was inevitably exaggerated.

Omani companies and investors were badly burnt in 1998 after shares plunged 52.5 per cent in the year on the region's once-booming stock market.

The MSM, which soared 141 per cent in 1997 to rank among the world's best performing bourses, began to head downwards in February last year amid a liquidity crunch and slumping world oil prices.

Traders have blamed a series of highly oversubscribed initial public offerings (IPOs) and capital increases early in 1998 for diverting funds away from the bourse.

In October, Oman's Sultan Qaboos decreed the setting up of a special committee to investigate the sharp fall in the market.

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'Potentially lethal road rage' gets Tyson a year in jail

ROCKVILLE, Maryland (AP) — Before sending Mike Tyson back to jail, Judge Stephen Johnson discussed the two sides of the former heavyweight champion.

He had heard about the fragile family man who likes helping his community, and the volatile and angry monster who could snap at any moment.

In the end, the judge decided it wasn't possible to tell which Tyson would be walking the streets of a community at any given moment.

He gave the 32-year-old fighter one year behind bars for assaulting two motorists, a sentence that jeopardizes the career of one of the boxing's greatest heavyweights.

"Witnesses say he is kind, caring and thoughtful," Johnson said.

"Unfortunately, this court cannot look into the defendant's mind.

He repeatedly speaks and acts compulsively and violently." The standing-room-only crowd in the courtroom groaned in surprise when Johnson announced the sentence.

Tyson slumped, but barely.

His wife, Monica, was in tears.

She tried to get to him, but couldn't push her way through a crowd of bailiffs.

"I think this was clearly a case of making an example of Michael one more time," said Michael Steele, Monica Tyson's brother.

"The prosecution in this case doggedly pursued this.

He wanted to put one in his column —'I got a celebrity, I'm making a point.' " Tyson was placed in handcuffs, then had them removed so he could sign some papers.

Then two sets of cuffs were placed on him, with his hands behind his back, and he was led away, showing little emotion the entire time.

Tyson kicked one motorist and punched another after a minor three-car accident in Gaithersburg, Md., on Aug. 31.

In December, Tyson pleaded no contest to two counts of second-degree assault — meaning he neither protested the charges nor admitted guilt.

Johnson called it "a tragic example of potentially lethal road rage." Tyson's lawyers, through a series of witnesses, portrayed it as the act of a man under stress because of mounting debts and the revocation of his boxing licence.

"He felt like he couldn't provide for us," testified Monica Tyson, fighting back tears.

"My husband is a good, kind person.

He's got his life together, and he's doing the right things." Witnesses also said Tyson's career would be ruined if he sent to jail because it could lead to more prison time in Indiana — where Tyson is still on probation — and another revocation of his boxing licence.

Tyson, who did not speak during the three-hour hearing, said as much himself in a letter to the judge, read aloud by Johnson.

"Jail," Tyson wrote, "would mean I lose everything." The full sentence is two years in jail, with one year suspended on each count, to be served concurrently.

Tyson was also fined $5,000 and will have to serve two years' probation and perform 200 hours of community service upon release.

With good behaviour, he could be released in six months.

Meanwhile, authorities in Indiana must decide if Tyson has violated his probation from his 1991 rape conviction.

Tyson was released in 1995 after serving three years of a six-year sentence, and his probation was set to expire in March.

"The judge is waiting for her paperwork to come from Maryland," said David Deputy, a bailiff in the court where Tyson was sentenced in Marion County, Indiana.

The decision came three weeks after Tyson's successful comeback against Francois Botha, his first fight since he lost his licence for biting Evander Holyfield's ears during a championship bout in June 1997.

Tyson was scheduled to fight April 24 in Las Vegas against an opponent to be determined.

The sentence could lead to a review of Tyson's licence by the Nevada State Athletic Commission.

Dr. James Nave, the only Nevada commissioner who voted against Tyson when the panel reinstated his licence, said it was possible the five members would take no further action, especially since the licence expires Dec. 31.

"If he's going to be in jail for a year, there's not much need at this point for us to take action," Nave said.

Tyson can appeal within 30 days.

If the appeal is granted, he would stand trial on the charges.

He cannot be released on bail before Monday, when he can request a hearing.

Prosecutors said they might not have pressed for jail had Tyson been more contrite.

"This was a violent assault against two people," Montgomery County State's Attorney Douglas Gansler said.

"We don't tolerate violence and we don't tolerate road rage." The two victims, Abmielec Saucedo and Richard Hardick, settled out of court, and were against sending Tyson to jail.

Both were at the hearing.

Among the witnesses were the head of a local homeless shelter where Tyson recently performed volunteer work, and Tyson's manager, Shelley Finkel.

Finkel testified the fighter had $20 million in debts, mostly to the IRS.

"Any time at this point that he would be taken out of the ring would be a real death sentence," Finkel said.

"There is the likelihood that he would lose his licence, which would be tantamount to banning him from boxing." Tyson's lawyers also said the fighter was not taking his antidepressants at the time of the accident.

Tyson, who has been undergoing therapy at Georgetown University Hospital, was taking medication to help control his volatile behaviour.

Prosecutors, however, hammered away at Tyson's violent past, referring to the fighter as a "time bomb." They were unimpressed with Tyson's financial problems.

"This is not about commerce," Carol Crawford, the assistant state's attorney, told the judge.

"The overriding concern shouldn't be the gross national product of Mike Tyson.

It's about protecting the community."

Former world heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson is led away in handcuffs Feb. 05 in Gaithersburg, Maryland, after being sentenced to a year in prison for assaulting two drivers after an August '98 traffic accident. The 32-year-old Tyson was found guilty of kicking one driver and punching another after a three-car accident (AFP photo)

Hingis, Coetzer advance to finals

TOKYO (AP) — Martina Hingis, fresh from winning the Australian Open last week, regained the world's top singles ranking Saturday as she beat Wimbledon champion Jana Novotna 6-3, 6-4 in the Toray Pan pacific Open semifinals.

The WTA, the world's governing body for the women's professional tennis tour, is scheduled to release a new weekly ranking on Monday.

The Swiss teenager has been ranked second to Lindsay Davenport of the United States since last Oct. 12.

Hingis was just 16 years old when she first climbed to the No. 1 rank on March 31, 1997, surging ahead of Steffi Graf of Germany.

Top-seeded Davenport, a semifinalist in the Australian Open, was eliminated in the quarterfinals Friday by No. 7 seed Amanda Coetzer of South Africa.

In the final Sunday, second seed Hingis meets Coetzer, who ousted fourth-seeded Monica Seles of the United States 6-4, 6-2 in the other semifinals match.

In the day's first match, a couple of errors and a double fault cost Hingis a break in the opening game. But her 20-year-old doubles partner from the Czech Republic suffered from errors and lost her serve twice to lose the first set.

Novotna fought back with good serves and aggressive play to start the second set with a love game. But she couldn't keep up the pressure, slipping back into error-prone play.

"I was 16 when I first got the No. 1 rank," a jubilant Hingis said. "I just hope I can now hold on to it longer, maybe as long as I play tennis."

"Today I was confident going into the match because I have better winning record against Jana," Hingis said. In their seven encounters since 1997, Novotna won just once, in the 1998 Wimbledon semifinals.

"I hope I don't have to celebrate after losing the final tomorrow," Hingis added.

Novotna said: "I thought I started kind of well. I was up 2-0 in the first. But then I just made too many mistakes, and Martina is too good of a player to allow that to happen."

In the other semifinals match, there were five service breaks in the first set before Coetzer held it for 5-4 and then took control of the match.

"I really have to give credit to Amanda," Seles said. "She played much better today and I just couldn't find my form at all."

The former No. 1 player in the world said she is midway through a two-year shape-up program and feels since December that she has made some strides.

"I had two good tournaments in Australia and here. But obviously there's still a long way to go to be able to perform well at every match."

She's currently ranked fourth in the world, next to Novotna.

"This year, of course I hope I do well at grand slams and play really consistent tennis throughout," Seles said. She plans to play next in the Evert Cup at Indian Wells, California, March 4-14.

Coetzer, ranked 15th in the world, said: "I had never beaten her before. So it really feels good to do that for the first time."

With regard to Sunday's final, she said, "I don't think Hingis has any specific weakness. That's why she's been playing good and winning so much. I think I just go out there and do my best."

Monica Seles of the U.S. reacts to a point lost to Amanda Coetzer of South Africa during their semi finals match at the Toray Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament in Tokyo Feb. 06. Coetzer defeated the former number one Seles 4-6, 2-6 (AFP photo)

Amanda Coetzer of South Africa returns a ball to Monica Seles of the U.S. during their semi finals match at the Toray Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament in Tokyo Feb. 06. Coetzer defeated the former No. 1 player Seles 6-4, 6-2 for the right to battle Martina Hingis in the final (AFP photo)

Florence Masnada of France passes a gate Feb. 05 during the first run of the Women's Slalom Combined in Vail, Colorado. Masnada took first place in the slaloms first run and is in second overall after two events (AFP photo)

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Freeman drops out of race with injury

CANBERRA (AP) — Australian Tania Van Heer ran a personal best Saturday to win the Optus grand prix's women's 200 metres after world 400-metre champion Cathy Freeman failed to finish due to injury. Van Heer later broke down in a relay event, although it was not known how serious her injury was. She fell to the track in the first leg of the women's 400-metre relay after earlier running 22.41 seconds in the 200 metres. Van Heer went to the physiotherapy tent after her 200-metre win to console Freeman, who pulled up with a strained quadricep. Freeman described her injury, the irritation of a training injury three weeks ago, as a mixed blessing. "It's very frustrating," Freeman said. "At least one good thing I did get out of tonight was realising how much more work I actually have to do to be competitive with Tania." Van Heer won two gold medals at the Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games last September. Freeman missed the Games due to injury.

Gilmour upset by Holmberg

PERTH, Australia (R) — Seasoned Swedish skipper Magnus Holmberg, ranked 11 in the world, caused a big upset when he beat world champion Peter Gilmour 2-0 in Saturday's Australia Cup semifinals. In Sunday's final on Perth's Swan River, Holmberg meets New Zealand skipper Gavin Brady. Brady, third in the world, had a tougher fight against the rising young Croat skipper Tomislav Basic, ranked 14, eventually beating him 2-1 to qualify for the final. Holmberg seemed at ease in the light and shifting winds after getting off to good starts in both races and saw off the Australian to the surprise of many. Gilmour is skipper of the Nippon America's Cup challenge and has been racing here with the Japanese Pizza-La team. In the other semi, Basic got the upper hand in his first encounter with Brady, but the Kiwi levelled the score in the next race. In the decider, Basic got Brady penalised on the starting line, but then let his man go off to the other side of the course where he found a favourable breeze.

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China maintains leadership as Asia's sports powerhouse

YONGPYONG (AFP) — China defended its leadership as Asia's sports powerhouse by bagging 15 gold medals in the Asian Winter Games which ended here Saturday.

The widening scandal over Salt Lake City's bid for the 2002 Winter Games stole the international spotlight from this scenic valley, the possible venue for the 2010 winter Olympics.

But organisers of the eight-day games — which got off to a shaky start with athletes struck down by suspected food poisoning and amid rows over medal awards — declared them a success, notably because they were doping free. International Olympic Committee (IOC) vice president Kim Un-Yong branded the Yongpyong Asiad "a great occasion" to prove the quality of the Asian Winter Games.

"Korea now has the know-how and skills needed to hold a winter games," said Kim, 67, who has been dogged by what he called "groundless" allegations he was involved in the scandal.

Kim, who has been tipped as a possible successor to IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch, is still under investigation as part of the biggest scandal to hit the Olympic movement. But he has proclaimed his innocence.

South Korea finished second, trailing China with 11 gold, 10 silver and 14 bronze medals, in the eight-day snow and ice event attended by 522 athletes from 21 countries.

The good record was unexpected, South Korean officials conceded. South Korea shared third with Japan at the medal tally in Harbin. China and South Korea stood out in the speedskating where Japan fielded a second-string team.

Kazakhstan, runner-up at the 1996 Harbin games, collected 10 golds for third place by proving its strength in the ice hockey.

Kazakhstan and Japan tied 1-1 in Saturday's ice hockey finals, but the Kazahks took the gold as they were ahead of the Japanese overall.

Kazakhstan also dominated the cross-country skiing by winning five of six golds, giving way to Japan only in the women's five kilometre.

Japan was fourth at the medal tally with six golds, two fewer than they won in Harbin, despite a last charge on Friday.

Uzbekistan, the newcomer in the winter Asiad, took home one gold on a sole success throughh Tatyana Malinina in the women's figure skating singles.

Hoddle blasts Banks

LONDON (AFP) — Former England coach Glenn Hoddle hit out at British Sports Minister Tony Banks on Saturday, claiming he had played a part in his dismissal as boss of the England national team.

Hoddle also hinted that British Prime Minister Tony Blair might regret his own intervention in the matter, when he said on live television that Hoddle should quit if he had been accurately reported.

Banks said categorically that Hoddle should go and his remarks — alongside those of Blair's — were seen by many as playing a crucial role in the FA's decision to remove Hoddle.

Hoddle said: "What disappointed me was the Sports Minister (Banks). Don't you think he should have phoned me first? He jumped on the bandwagon a little bit too quick. That built up, that snowballed and in the end the press could react on the back of that."

Hoddle was asked about the Prime Minister's comments during Monday's lightweight but much watched chat show This Morning following the article in The Times on Saturday.

Hoddle said: "The Prime Minister is a different situation, completely. To be fair to the prime minister he got his PA, Alistair Campbell, to phone me that very morning after he had been on the show to find out the details.

"He said he had been put under pressure and misinterpreted.

Ironically it is the same situation as I found myself in with the article in the first place."

Hoddle claimed his remarks, which implied that disabled people were being punished for sins committed in a previous life, had been misreported.

"He (Blair) actually said 'if he (Hoddle) said it, and I don't know if he did say it, let's find out'. Maybe the prime minister in hindsight might have looked at it and thought 'well, that's an FA issue, let the FA deal with it."

Sorry for the corruption mess, Samaranch tells Nagano

NAGANO (AFP) — International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch apologised Saturday for the corruption scandal tarnishing anniversary celebrations of the 1998 Winter Games in Nagano.

"On behalf of the Olympic movement, may I first of all express my apologies to the athletes of Japan and to all of you for the difficult situation we are facing at the present time." Samaranch said in a message read by IOC vice president Pal Schmitt at a symposium.

Samaranch said the scandal forced him to cancel his attendance at ceremonies here to mark the anniversary of the biggest Winter Games in history.

But the IOC "is determined to take the appropriate decisions" to root out corruption, said Samaranch.

Since senior IOC executive member Marc Hodler brought to light corruption in Salt Lake City's bid, four IOC members have quit and another five are set to be expelled at an IOC meeting in March.

Hodler, who visited the anniversary ceremonies, said Nagano has nothing to fear from a corruption probe, even if it had paid for votes.

"My only purpose is to eliminate all those who are not honest," Hodler said in an interview with AFP.

"Even if they had to pay for certain votes, we would not blame for that. We blame ourselves," Hodler said. "Nobody wants to blame Nagano whatever happens. You should not worry."

The corruption probe has spread to other bid cities, including Nagano, which won the 1991 host race by allegedly spending millions of dollars and giving expensive gifts to IOC members.

At the symposium, Nagano Mayor Tasuku Tsukada insisted the city had done no wrong. "Since the bid campaign, we have been trying hard in a fair manner... for the success of the Olympics."

Tsukada has previously admitted there was "some excess" but claimed the city did not take any illegal action.

Japanese Olympic Committee secretary general Yushiro Yagi arrived in Nagano with a seven-member panel on a weekend fact-finding mission into the city's bid following a request from the IOC.

In the interview, Hodler said the deadline for the creation of a new Olympic bidding system would be mid-June, when the IOC is to meet in Seoul to select the host city of the 2006 Winter Games.

"We should be ready on the 19th of June," he said. "That's our deadline. Otherwise we lose our prestige and any respect from the world. We have to finish this completely by then."

But Hodler said investigation must continue unless the IOC can "once and for all quickly clean up our house."

Asked whether the scandal would further expand, Hodler said: "I don't mind."

Hundreds of people packed the centre of Nagano Saturday for anniversary celebrations.

Central Square was filled with fans for a rock concert, young people remembering the Games and street vendors selling souvenirs including Olympics pins.

But the festivities have been marred by the scandal.

"We had a problem when some sponsors suddenly dropped their support for the event because of the scandal," said Koji Machida, an official organising Saturday's concert.

"We also had to tone down some phrases in our advertisement for the event in order to show our self-restraint," he said. "The timing of the scandal was really bad."

Most people in Nagano were determined to enjoy the day despite the scandal.

"I am enjoying the atmosphere that we felt a year ago," said Ayako Sato, a 20-year-old student. "I have been waiting for the anniversary for a long time."

Muneyoshi Aikawa, 21, a worker at a plastics firm, said: "Time has passed so quickly since the Olympics. I feel as if we had the extraordinary event just yesterday."

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Pacers beat Wizards 96-81 on NBA's opening night

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Jalen Rose scored 11 of his 16 points in the fourth quarter and Indiana capitalized on a big advantage from the free-throw line to defeat Washington 96-81 Friday night in the first game of the abbreviated NBA season.

A sellout crowd of 16,621 was treated to a show of depth by the Pacers, who had 10 players score. The fans showed no signs of unhappiness over the lockout, and the play wasn't too sloppy as the teams combined for 25 turnovers.

The Wizards hit all of their free throws, but Indiana had a 29-9 advantage from the line.

76ers 78, Hornets 66

In Charlotte, North Carolina, Theo Ratliff had 13 points and nine rebounds and Philadelphia overcame a subpar game by Allen Iverson to win in Charlotte for the first time in nearly seven years.

Philadelphia capitalised on an extended shooting slump by the injury-riddled Hornets to end a 12-game losing skid at the Charlotte Coliseum dating to April 1992.

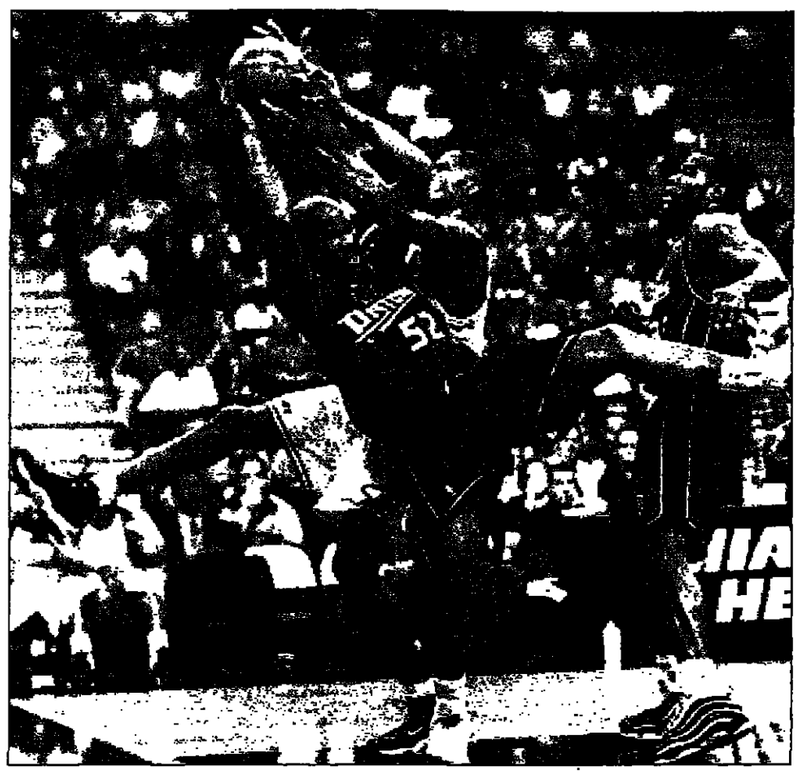
Charlotte made just three of its final 17 field-goal attempts over the last 13 minutes, including a stretch of nearly 12 minutes in which the Hornets made just one basket.

Pistons 95, Heat 81

In Miami, smothering defence and Jerry Stackhouse's 24 points off the bench helped Detroit beat Miami.

Although the game was a sellout, there were several thousand empty seats at the start of the first game in Miami in nine months. When the arena eventually filled up, the crowd was reserved but polite, with boos saved for the officials.

Grant Hill scored 19 points for the Pistons. Jamal Mashburn had 19 and Tim Hardaway 18 for Miami.



Detroit Pistons' center Don Reid (#52) and Miami Heat forward P.J. Brown fight for a rebound during second period action of their game at the Miami Arena Friday (AFP photo)

Hawks 100, Cavaliers 83

In Atlanta, the Hawks, hoping to begin the season with another quick start, outscored the Cleveland Cavaliers 24-4 over the final eight minutes.

Steve Smith scored 21 points for the Hawks, who began last season with 11 straight victories.

The announced crowd of 19,806 was more than 2,000 more than the first game at the Georgia Dome last season. Hoping to lure back fans after the lockout, the Hawks sold about half the seats in the cavernous arena for $10.

Magic 93, Knicks 85

In Orlando, Florida, Nick Anderson scored 19 points and Orlando held off a late rally led by Latrell Sprewell to ruin the controversial guard's debut with the New York Knicks.

Orlando outscored New York 25-4 during a nine-minute stretch of the second quarter to break open a close game, and the Magic led 73-58 at the start of the fourth quarter before the Knicks rallied and cut the margin to five.

Sprewell, playing in his first game since being suspended for the final 68 games of last season for choking Golden State coach P.J. Carlesimo, scored 24 points for the Knicks.

Raptors 103, Celtics 92

In Boston, Kevin Willis, who criticised the union during the lockout, had 28 points and 16 rebounds to lead Toronto over Boston.

The Raptors never trailed after taking a 34-32 lead on a driving dunk by Doug Christie with 6:55 left in the first half.

Christie finished with 27 points.

Boston was led by Antoine Walker with 21 points and rookie Paul Pierce with 19.

Post-Jordan Bulls open season with a defeat

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah (AFP) — The rematch was not a mismatch, but the post-Michael Jordan era began as expected for the Chicago Bulls: with a defeat.

Tim Floyd's National Basketball Association coaching debut with the new-look Bulls began on a down note as the Utah Jazz defeated Chicago 104-96 in a rematch of last year's NBA Finals.

Friday marked the beginning of the shortest NBA season in more than 50 years.

The 204-day lockout slashed three months from the season, reducing each team's schedule from 82 to 50 games, squeezed into 89 days.

To further confuse matters, dozens of players changed teams in the abbreviated training camp period.

Chicago, which returned only guard Ron Harper from its starting five from last season, began life after Jordan by playing catch-up for almost the entire game.

Following the resignation of coach Phil Jackson and the retirement of Jordan, there was a mass exodus from the Bulls as forwards Scottie Pippen, Dennis Rodman and Scott Burrell, centers Luc Longley and Joe Kleine and guards Steve Kerr and Jud Buechler all left the team via free agency or trades.

Even so, the Bulls made things interesting in the fourth quarter, pulling within 92-85 with 6:47 to go on a layup by Toni Kukoc, who scored 22 of his 32 points in the second half.

The Jazz regrouped as Bryon Russell had a layup and Karl Malone hit two free throws, bumping the lead to 11 at the 5:13 mark. Chicago came no closer than five points thereafter.

Malone finished with 21 points for the Jazz, who lost to the Bulls in the last two NBA Finals.

In Orlando, Latrell Sprewell played his first regular-season game since he choked Golden State Warriors coach P.J. Carlesimo on December 1, 1997.

A three-time All-Star, Sprewell was suspended for 68 games last season and was traded to the New York Knicks last month.

He scored 24 points, but new teammates Allan Houston and Patrick Ewing were lackluster as the Knicks fell 95-83 to the Magic.

Wearing his hair in long braids, Sprewell was lightly booed by the Orlando Arena crowd. One woman in the courtside seats held a sign that read "Choke!" when Sprewell attempted foul shots.

English Premiership Results

LONDON (AFP) — English Premiership results on Saturday:

Aston Villa 1 (Joachim 69) Blackburn Rovers 3 (Southgate og-32, Ward 62, Dunn 64) Chelsea 1 (Zola 11) Southampton 0

Leeds United 0 Newcastle United 1 (Solano 63) Leicester City 0 Sheffield Wednesday 2 (Jonk 48, Carbone 78) Liverpool 3 (Owen 9, Heggem 44, Ince 45) Middlesbrough 1 (Stamp 86) Nottm Forest 1 (Rogers 6) Man Utd 8 (Yorke 2, 66, Cole 7, 49, Solskjaer 80, 87, 90, 90) Tottenham Hotspur 0 Coventry City 0 West Ham United 0 Arsenal 4 (Bergkamp 35, Overmars 45, Anelka 83, Parlour 87)

VACANCY

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is seeking a dynamic individual to serve as a Project Management Specialist for the water activities. The incumbent will serve as a senior professional water policy/engineer and will provide advice on water related issues.

Qualifications

The incumbent:
— should have a master degree in relevant field, i.e., engineering, water resources, environmental studies or related science. A PhD degree in relevant field is desirable;
— should have six to eight years of progressively responsible professional experience in managing water and wastewater infrastructure and water resources projects or managing donor-assisted development programmes in the area of water resources and/or water related environmental policy;
— should have a good working knowledge of Jordan's water and environmental situation, international and Jordanian engineering design and construction practices;
— should have an excellent communication skills, strong technical, analytical and conceptual skills to analyse issues, project management skills, and must have computer skills in Windows-based word processing/spread-sheet applications; and
— should be fluent in written and spoken English.

Only qualified applicants who meet the above requirements should submit resumes and verifiable references with telephone numbers to the address below by February 23, 1999. This is a Personal Services Contract. Salary will range from JD13,119 - JD21,647 depending on qualifications and previous salary history.

Executive Office (Personnel)
Ref.: Project Management Specialist Position
U.S. Agency for International Development
P.O. Box 354, Amman-11118, Jordan.

Buss 'doubtful' Rodman will join Lakers

INGLEWOOD, California (AP) — Money may be the reason Dennis Rodman doesn't play for the Los Angeles Lakers.

The most the Lakers could offer Rodman is the prorated portion of the veteran minimum of $1 million, well under the $18 million he earned the last two seasons with Chicago.

"I just don't imagine Dennis playing for that kind of money," Lakers owner Jerry Buss said Friday night. "But it's not over until the fat lady sings."

Buss said he last saw Rodman 10 days ago and the two talked.

"It's looking doubtful," Buss said. "How interested was I? I was very interested. Dennis is someone that could give us rebounding like we have never had, particularly at that position. He's a true talent. In a way, I was just hoping somehow if he chose a team, it would be us. I know he wants to play here."

Buss suggested Rodman and his well-known antics would be tolerated by Los Angeles fans hungry for a championship, something the Lakers haven't won since 1988.

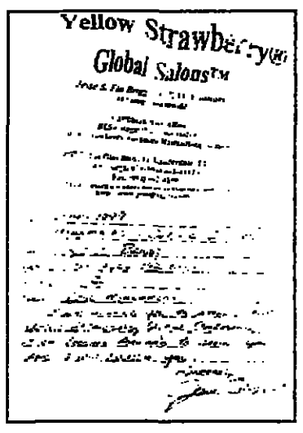
"You can't please everybody. Some people don't even like the Laker Girls. Dennis is a talent," Buss said. "...I think a lot of people would forgive him as long as he tried to act somewhat normally."

He said the rest of the Lakers don't think Rodman would be a distraction.

"So it would remain to be seen," Buss said. "Dennis is Dennis. You're not about to tell Dennis how to be someone else.

You take him the way he is."

Hammodeh Hair Designer



Today departs to USA Mr. Hamoudeh, the famous and internationally known hair designer , after receiving a special invitation from Yellow Strawberry, to participate and represent the middle east at the international convention for hair designers which will take place on Feb. 20th, 1999.

This is not the first time that Mr. Hamoudeh represents the Middle East, as for the last year he has been invited he has been chosen as the best hair dresser among 25 other participants in Milan- Italy, after also receiving a special invitation.

Mr. Hammodeh would like to extend his thanks to the Jordanian Tunisian Co. for the financial and moral support, to Mr. Amer Al- Hamouri for his effort in helping him coordinate with Yellow Strawberry Co in the united States , to the Italian Co. Framisi, to Mr. Amer Nassirdeen the executive manager at CNS the internet company in Jordan, and a special thanks to Mr. Jesse the owner of Yellow Strawberry.

Furthermore, Mr. Hammodeh will be travelling to many states to give his lectures , and will be back soon to open one of the greatest beauty parlors in the Middle East.

Management of Hammodeh beauty parlor
Tel. 962-6-5933828 Mobile. 0795-22492
e-mail: hammodeh@cns.go.com.jo
www.cns.com.jo\hammodeh

Fighting resumes as Eritrea, Ethiopia trade accusations

ADDIS ABABA (AFP) — Heavy fighting resumed Saturday along the disputed border between Ethiopia and Eritrea as the two sides traded accusations of sparking the hostilities.

The Ethiopian government announced here that the Eritrean army had launched a "full-scale attack" on Ethiopian troops on the northwestern Badme front at dawn on Saturday.

"The fighting today is a full-scale attempt by Eritrea to control and destroy Ethiopia's military positions," a government statement said.

It added: "Ethiopian defence forces are currently engaged in full-scale combat to defend their positions and to repel Eritrea's invading army."

Eritrean Radio, monitored in Addis Ababa, also said Saturday that fighting had resumed on the Badme front, but charged that Ethiopia had launched the hostilities at dawn.

An Eritrean foreign ministry statement, received in Nairobi earlier Saturday, accused Ethiopia of mounting "a large-scale attack against Eritrea" in an area north of Badme.

"The regime in Addis Ababa has been consistently rejecting calls for a cessation of hostilities and threatening to launch the war any time, which it has done today," the statement said.

Numerous reports of military incidents have fanned tensions between the two Horn of Africa countries, which have been in conflict since last May over their ill-defined border.

Eritrean forces have controlled Badme since the start of the conflict, and the town has become for Addis Ababa a symbol of "Eritrean aggression."

On Friday, Ethiopia accused its neighbour of launching an air strike against the northern border town of Adigrat to target a fuel depot.

Asmara dismissed the claim as "complete fabrication" and counter-charged that Ethiopia was preparing "full-scale" hostilities.

If confirmed, the raid on Adigrat would be the first aerial bombardment reported since last June, when both sides signed a U.S.-brokered pact to halt airstrikes.

Ethiopians who contacted family members in Adigrat told AFP that fighter-bombers had overflown the town, lying 25 kilometres from the front, and that they had heard explosions, but were unable to identify the planes. No damage or casualties were reported.

Diplomats in Addis Ababa also said planes had overflown the town.

A Western diplomat speaking to AFP in Nairobi by telephone from Asmara said no aircraft were seen taking off from the airport there on Friday.

"All eyewitness reports agree that the MiGs belonging to the Eritrean air force stayed on the ground on Friday," the diplomat said.

"The impression is, throughout the Western community in Asmara, that the supposed bombing of Adigrat was an operation fabricated by Addis Ababa to justify their offensive in the Badme sector," the source said.

Ethiopia also charged that Eritrean artillery shelled Ethiopian positions on Tuesday on the front north of Adigrat and that on Thursday cannons fired for four hours on the Badme front. Eritrea has also denied these charges.

The area has also been barred to non-residents and tourists, as well as foreign journalists.

Ethiopian Airlines on Saturday announced an indefinite suspension of flights to the northwestern town of Bahir Dar and northern Mekele.

It also announced that Ethiopian Airlines passengers heading for Addis Ababa from Europe had been "temporarily" diverted to Nairobi in view of the fighting.

Meanwhile, U.N. special envoy for Africa Mohammad Sahnoun is in Addis Ababa on a last-ditch mediation mission.

After a stop in Asmara, Sahnoun has been meeting Ethiopian authorities since Thursday, and is slated to consult with Salim Ahmad Salim, head of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) based here, before heading back to New York on Sunday.

Diplomats said Sahnoun believed Asmara may yet agree to an OAU peace plan that has been accepted by Addis Ababa.

Asmara has yet to respond to clarifications it has received on the implementation of the 11-point peace plan, which calls for Eritrean forces to withdraw from the positions they took up in May.

PRAYERS FOR THE KING: A man offers prayers for His Majesty King Hussein in Amman on Saturday (AFP photo)

Arab League drafts plan to end Iraq embargo

CAIRO (AFP) — The Arab League has drafted a plan to work with China, France and Russia to end the embargo against Iraq, a League official said here Saturday.

"The Arab League has adopted a plan of action on Iraq that will be reviewed by the ministerial follow-up committee at its meeting set to take place soon in Damascus under the chairmanship of Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Sharaa," said the official who asked not to be named.

He said the plan centres on "serious" cooperation with China, France and Russia, the three permanent members of the U.N. Security Council which are opposed to maintaining the sanctions against Baghdad.

"The proposal focuses on the Arab World's total opposition to any attack on Iraq's territorial integrity and any intereference in its internal affairs," the official said, adding that it would also call on Baghdad to "prove its good intentions toward Kuwait."

Iraq has been under U.N. sanctions since its 1990 invasion of Kuwait that led to the Gulf War.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Sahhaf accused Arab countries of "plotting" against Iraq after storming out of a meeting of League foreign ministers last month that failed to meet Baghdad's call for a unilateral lifting of U.N. sanctions.

The ministers further angered Baghdad by demanding an Iraqi apology for invading Kuwait and saying Iraq should "immediately stop provoking its neighbours."

Their statement urged Iraq "to take the necessary steps to prove its peaceful intentions towards Kuwait and other neighbours by admitting that the Kuwaiti invasion was an error that violates the Arab League charter."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Seven killed in Egyptian road accident

CAIRO (AFP) — Seven people were killed and four others injured on Saturday when a taxi bound for the northern city of Alexandria smashed into a lorry that had broken down at the roadside, police said. All the victims were in the taxi. The driver was among those killed. The injured passengers were taken to hospital. The accident happened 60 kilometers north of Cairo, on a desert stretch of motorway. Police said the accident appeared to have been caused by fog, which prevented the driver seeing the lorry in time.

Three dead in Kosovo as talks open

PRISTINA (AFP) — At least three people were killed Saturday evening in an explosion at a vegetable store in Kosovo's capital Pristina, police at the scene said. Several people were seriously injured, the police told AFP. The blast happened around 6:45 p.m. local time, within minutes of French President Jacques Chirac opening Kosovo peace talks at Rambouillet castle, outside Paris.

Senate clerk killed crossing street

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate clerk whose reading of the roll has become familiar to viewers of President Bill Clinton's impeachment trial was struck and killed by a motorist on a suburban street. Saturday's Senate trial session began with prayers and a moment of silence for Raymond Scott Bates, 50, a legislative clerk who worked at the Senate for almost 30 years. His wife also was struck in the Friday night accident and was injured critically. Bates' chair, below that of Chief Justice William Rehnquist, was draped with a black ribbon. Bates and his wife, Ricki Ellison Bates, were hit by a 22-year-old driver as they crossed a street in Arlington, Virginia, about Friday evening. The two were flown to Washington Hospital Centre, where Bates died a few hours later. Mrs. Bates was listed in critical condition this morning.

Spain busts immigration racket

MADRID (AFP) — Spanish police arrested 16 Chinese people in the areas around Madrid and Barcelona in a swoop on an international network smuggling Asians into Spain and other European states, police said Saturday. The arrests included seven leaders of the large network, the police said. The other detainees were immigrants whose papers were not in order. The crackdown began in mid-1998 after police noticed large numbers of Asians, in particular Chinese, who were arriving in Europe with passports that had been forged in Hong Kong and Bangkok. Immigrants trying to reach Spain promised to pay the network between two and four million pesetas ($14,000-$28,000). Once they arrived in Europe, the network took away their passports and forced them to work as virtual slave labour in restaurants or sweat shops, the police said.

Eight soldiers killed in Sudan clashes

KHARTOUM (AFP) — Eight soldiers were killed and nine were injured in an armed clash with "outlaws" in Sudan's Western Darfur state, the Khartoum press reported Saturday. Reporting from the state capital Geneina, the official Al Anbaa daily said a group identified only as "outlaws" launched an assault on Zaghawah village, south of the city. Local officials described the attack as an attempt to "disturb the tranquility that followed recent [tribal] clashes" in which 108 people were reportedly killed. The army soldiers retaliated, inflicting heavy but unspecified casualties on the assailants, for the loss of eight soldiers and nine wounded, the government paper said.

Iranian magazine deplores 'dull' clothes

TEHRAN (AFP) — An Iranian magazine described Islamic clothes women have been forced to wear since the 1979 Islamic revolution as "dull." "There are colourful fabrics in shops but most people wear dull-coloured clothes on the streets," said Iran-e-Javan (Young Iran), a weekly magazine for the young, published by the official IRNA news agency. "The colour black is like a dark hole swallowing all the world's colours," it said, referring to traditional black body-length cloaks or chadors many Iranian women wear every day. The paper bemoaned how little colour there is in Iranians' everyday clothes, though most government offices here refuse access to women wearing brightly coloured clothes, or men wearing short-sleeved shirts.

Iranian dissident cleric says ties with U.S. possible

TEHRAN (R) — A senior Iranian dissident cleric, in remarks published on Saturday, called for Iran to study re-establishing ties with the United States, saying the two countries' estrangement did not need to be permanent.

"This issue should be studied by foreign policy experts... away from factional considerations, and one should act resolutely if they conclude that it is in the interest of the country to re-establish relations," the daily Khordad quoted Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri as saying.

"The late Imam [Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini] called America the 'Great Satan' and generally rejected all ties with it, but it is obvious that such a ruling is temporary and could change according to economic and political conditions," Montazeri was quoted as saying in a newly published pamphlet.

Hostile ties between Tehran and Washington have thawed somewhat since the 1997 election of moderate President Mohammad Khatami. But few political figures in Iran have openly called for establishing ties with the United States.

Last year, Khatami called for increased people-to-people exchanges to ease tensions. Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has ruled out relations with Washington.

"If a bad record were the norm for cutting ties, Britain and Russia have damaged Iran more in the past than America has. Therefore the norm is the current situation of states and the world and the interests of our revolution and system, not what happened in the past," Montazeri said.

Montazeri has lived under house arrest since late 1997, when he publicly criticised Khamenei. The cleric has been Iran's leading dissident since Khomeini removed him as his designated successor months before his death in 1989.

Colombian rebels welcome government decision on demilitarised zone

BOGOTA (AFP) — Left-wing guerrillas Saturday welcomed the Colombian government's decision to continue the demilitarisation of a vast zone in the south as part of an effort to kick-start stalled peace talks.

President Andres Pastrana's decision "is a valuable contribution that strengthens the confidence and hope for peace with social justice that the Colombian people are yearning for," the rebels said in a statement.

In November, the Colombian government ordered troops to withdraw from some 42,000 square kilometres in southern Colombia for a period that was to have ended on Feb. 7.

The rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) had demanded that the government create the neutral zone before they would participate in peace talks.

In an official document issued Friday, the government indicated that the extension of the demilitarised zone until May 5 was aimed at "continuing the conversations" between the government and FARC, which the rebels suspended on Jan. 25 in response to heightened paramilitary violence.

The initial 90-day period, set to end Sunday, was deemed too short to allow the government to reach a political settlement with the rebels, peace commissioner Victor Ricardo said.

However, the guerrillas said that Pastrana's government had to show "positive results to the country and the world" that it was "effectively" combatting the right-wing paramilitaries before the talks could resume as planned on April 20.

"Positive results by the national government in dismantling the paramilitary forces would serve as a guarantee and advance talks aimed at achieving a lasting peace," said the 12,000-strong FARC, the largest, oldest and most aggressive rebel force in the country.

Rebel negotiator Raul Reyes said Saturday said the April 20 date could be put brought forward if the government was to take concrete action against the paramilitaries.

"We have to see results. We have asked the government for results, and that's what we are waiting for," Reyes insisted.

Paramilitary units have repeatedly attacked rebels and their suspected supporters.

SLA militiaman killed, 15 civilians wounded

MARJAYOUN (AFP) — A militiaman in the pro-Israeli South Lebanon Army (SLA) was killed in a Hizbollah bomb attack and 15 civilians wounded in shelling in southern Lebanon on Saturday.

One SLA militiaman was killed and another wounded by a bomb detonated by the Islamic Resistance, the armed wing of Hizbollah, which spearheads the campaign to drive Israel out of southern Lebanon, an SLA official told AFP.

Hizbollah issued a statement claimed responsibility for the attack on an SLA patrol.

In response to the bomb attack by the Iranian-backed Shiite Muslim group, Israeli troops and their SLA allies fired about 100 shells at sectors bordering the so-called "security zone" occupied by Israel in southern Lebanon, police said.

Twelve civilians in the village of Majdal Silm just outside the zone, were injured in the bombardment, police said, and three houses were damaged.

Half-an-hour later, a man and his two sons were wounded when mortar rounds landed in the village of Rihan, in the central part of the Israeli-occupied buffer zone, the SLA said.

It was not immediately clear who fired the rounds and no group claimed responsibility.

The SLA man was the first to die in southern Lebanon this year.

Taleban says U.S. gives ideas on Ben Laden

ISLAMABAD (R) — Afghanistan's ruling Taleban Islamic militia said on Saturday it had received new U.S. proposals about Saudi-born Islamist activist suspect Osama Ben Laden now living there and wanted by Washington.

A Taleban spokesman, quoted by a Pakistan-based Afghan news service, said the proposals, which he did not disclose, were conveyed by U.S. officials during their talks in Pakistan with Taleban representatives earlier this week and were yet to be considered by the Taleban leadership.

The proposals will be submitted to Taleban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar for consideration after which a response will be given, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) quoted spokesman Mullah Abdul Haye Mutmaen as saying.

The spokesman was speaking by telephone from the southern Afghan town of Kandahar, the militia headquarters.

Mutmaen said U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Karl Inderfurth, who met Taleban Deputy Foreign Minister Mullah Abdul Jalil, had also handed a letter for the Taleban leadership. But he did not disclose its contents.

AIP said it had learned from other sources that Washington had made three proposals — either Taleban hand over Ben Laden to the United States, or hand him over to Saudi Arabia, or expel him from Afghanistan.

Jalil did not give a reply to Inderfurth about the proposals, it quoted its sources as saying.

In the past, the Islamic militia has refused to hand over Ben Laden, saying he is a guest of the Taleban and has no involvement with terrorism of any kind.

The United States accuses Ben Laden of masterminding bomb attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania last August that killed 263 people and has offered a reward of $5 million for information leading to his arrest and conviction.

Ben Laden, who has denied the charge, also figured in talks that U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and Inderfurther held with Pakistani officials earlier this week.

Tight security, reporting ban at Yemen trial

ADEN (AFP) — A fourth hearing in the trial of five Britons and an Algerian on charges of planning a bombing spree in Yemen was staged Saturday under a heavy security cloak and a reporting ban.

At the same time, two more suspects were brought to a court in Zinjibar, east of Aden, to join three other men already on trial for the kidnapping of 16 Westerners which ended in a blood bath.

Yemeni Abdullah Saleh Al Juneidi admitted to taking part in abducting the hostages in late December and to membership of the "Islamic Army of Aden and Abyan."

However, Mohammad Saleh Abu Hurraira, a Tunisian, said he acted as a translator for the group.

The kidnapping trial opened on Jan. 13 when the alleged ringleader and two brothers were charged with the hostage-taking in which three British tourists and an Australian were killed in a botched rescue operation.

All five men have been charged with kidnapping, resisting security forces, illegal possession of firearms and explosives, and setting up an armed group blamed for several attacks in south Yemen.

Meanwhile, Yemen's Interior Minister Hussein Arab told the Cairo daily Al Ahram there would be no hesitation in carrying out executions if the defendants are sentenced to death.

"If this trial ends with a death sentence, we will not hesitate to carry it out," General Hussein Arab told Al Ahram.

In Aden, journalists were allowed to enter the court room but were told not to publish details of the proceedings. Cameramen and photographers were totally banned.

A weapons expert testified and four policemen gave evidence of finding rocket-launchers and explosives in a car abandoned by the accused after a chase.

One defence lawyer, Badr Basunaid, refused to take part in proceedings after security guards demanded to search his brief case.

"The trial is taking place under very strict security measures," Basunaid told AFP.

However, another defence lawyer, Sheikh Tareq Abdullah described the hearing as "more disciplined" than during previously when chaotic scenes were reported. "Basic rights have now been granted," he added.

The defence had been allowed to see the official charge list, although not given a copy, and allowed to meet the defendants in private, Abdullah told AFP.

The suspects have pleaded not guilty and alleged their confessions were beaten out of them.

The Yemeni authorities allege the group, arrested in late December, were sent to the country by London-based Islamist firebrand Abu Hamza Al Masri to bomb a series of British and American targets around this southern port city.

The trial next resumes Tuesday, the official SABA news agency said.

Meanwhile, in the capital Sanaa a tribal leader said intensive negotiations were underway to try to free two Germans held by tribesmen ahead of a visit Tuesday by the German foreign minister, a tribal leader said.

"Pressure is being increased to obtain the release of the two Germans before the visit," one tribal leader said explaining that an old blood vendetta had to be settled.

"The Yemenis are aware that there is a danger that [Joschka] Fischer will only talk about the hostages and not business during his two-day visit unless they are released well before his arrival," on Feb. 9, one Western diplomat said last week.

Germany is one Yemen's largest sources of aid totalling some $720 million over the last 20 years.